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Everybody's
MAGAZINE

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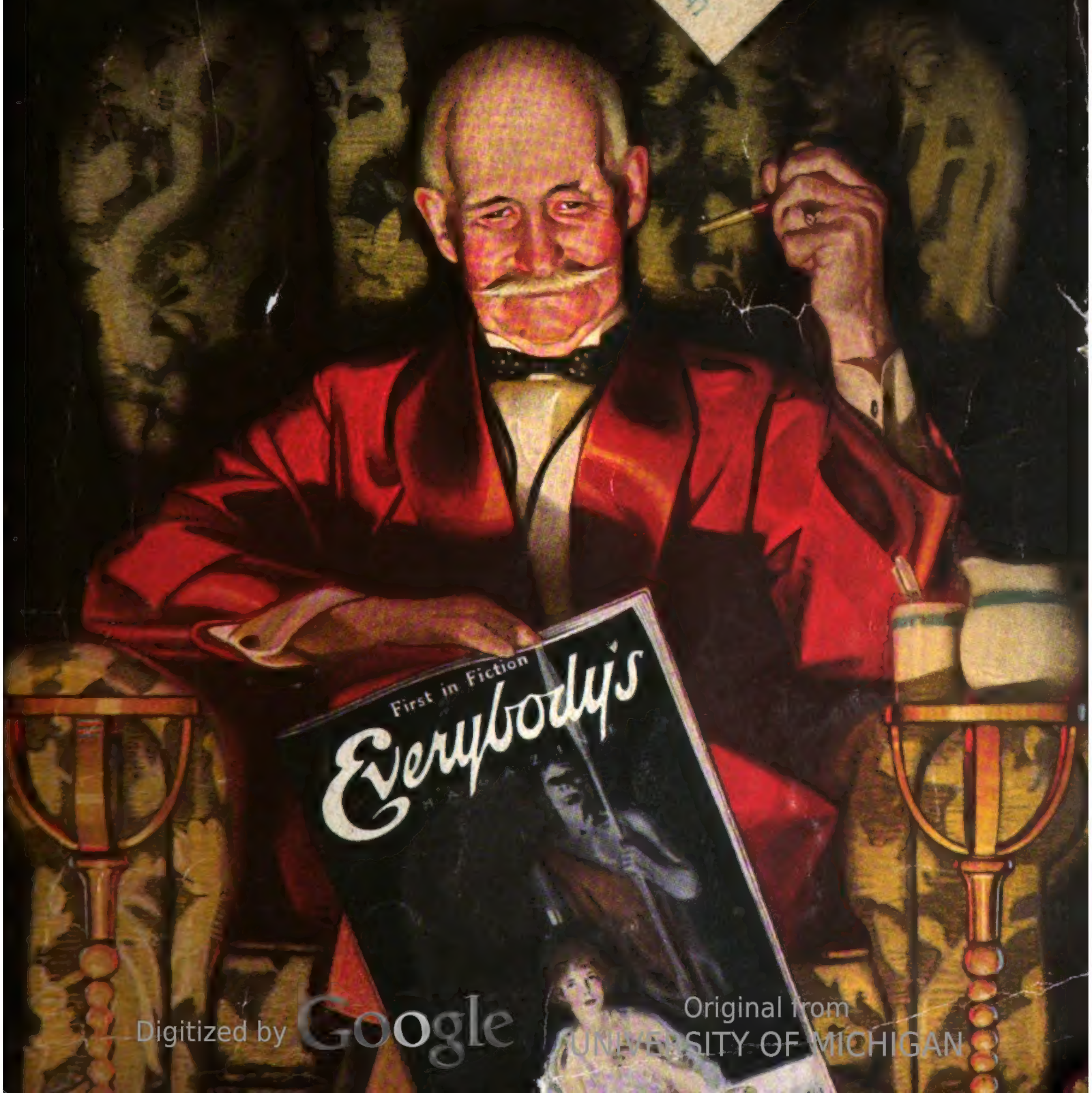
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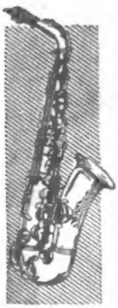

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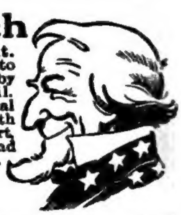

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Everybody's

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If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

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SWALLOWED UP

The Strange Story of a Girl

HOPE RANGER walked down the hall to her mother's sitting-room. The moment she had closed the door behind her a man servant stepped out of the automatic lift and followed her noiselessly. He paused close to the sitting-room door, his head inclined, listening.

"Going out, darling?" her mother asked.

"I'm going to lunch with Lucia and a party at the Plaza," Hope replied, "and afterward I'll pick up some veils and a few things I need, and then home. Why don't you come to luncheon with us? Do, mother!"

MRS. WILSON WOODROW
Author of "Swallowed Up"

The eavesdropper's mouth twisted downward as Mrs. Ranger hesitated; but his ugly expression cleared as he caught her answer, which was a refusal.

Hope ran down the stairs. A moment later she was walking through the cross-street on which she lived toward Fifth Avenue. She was in full accord with the delectable morning, and she showed it. The face of more than one passer-by brightened at sight of her.

Meanwhile, the man who had been listening at the keyhole stole furtively out of the house by an area door and went to a telephone station in a near-by cigar store.

Hope Ranger did not return home that night. She had disappeared. *To be continued in—*

April *EVERYBODY'S*—out March 15th

Everybody's

NUMBER THREE MARCH, 1922 VOLUME XLVI

Everybody's Tours for April

IN APRIL one begins to think of vacations—tours—of the trips that assure the most variety. Somebody, you will recall, has already said all there is to be said about variety, *and we like to think that if that person were alive he would recommend* Everybody's Tours for April—*for* variety, *at least. Here's the itinerary:*

First, you can tour the scenically delightful North Carolina mountains through Stanley Olmsted's intensely dramatic novelette, "Mountain Farmers." On the way you should read Sampson Raphaelson's "Lizette," because it's good fun, and "The Accusing Voice," by Stoddard Goodhue, because it's an absorbing scientific detective tale. As a side trip you can go hunting with Bozeman Bulger in "The Flight of Sadie."

After that, you can see the picturesque West in winter through Mrs. Willsie's powerful serial, "Godless Valley." On the way out you will find entertainment in Mrs. Wilson Woodrow's quick-fire mystery serial, "Swallowed Up." And there's a side trip to Alaska with Frank Richardson Pierce in "The Acid Test."

And, continuing, "The Lotus Bride," by Hrolf Wisby, will show you round the South Sea Islands. For entertainment on the boat read "Working With a Will," by Bonnie Ginger, a love-story of your own home town, and "The Man from Headquarters," the first of Capt. Hugh S. Martin's startling Russian secret-service revelations.

And there's a serious play, "Ambush," to see somewhere along the route, and a comedy, "Prose and Worse," by Gridley Adams.

These tours begin March 15th. When you have returned, if you want your money back, write us.

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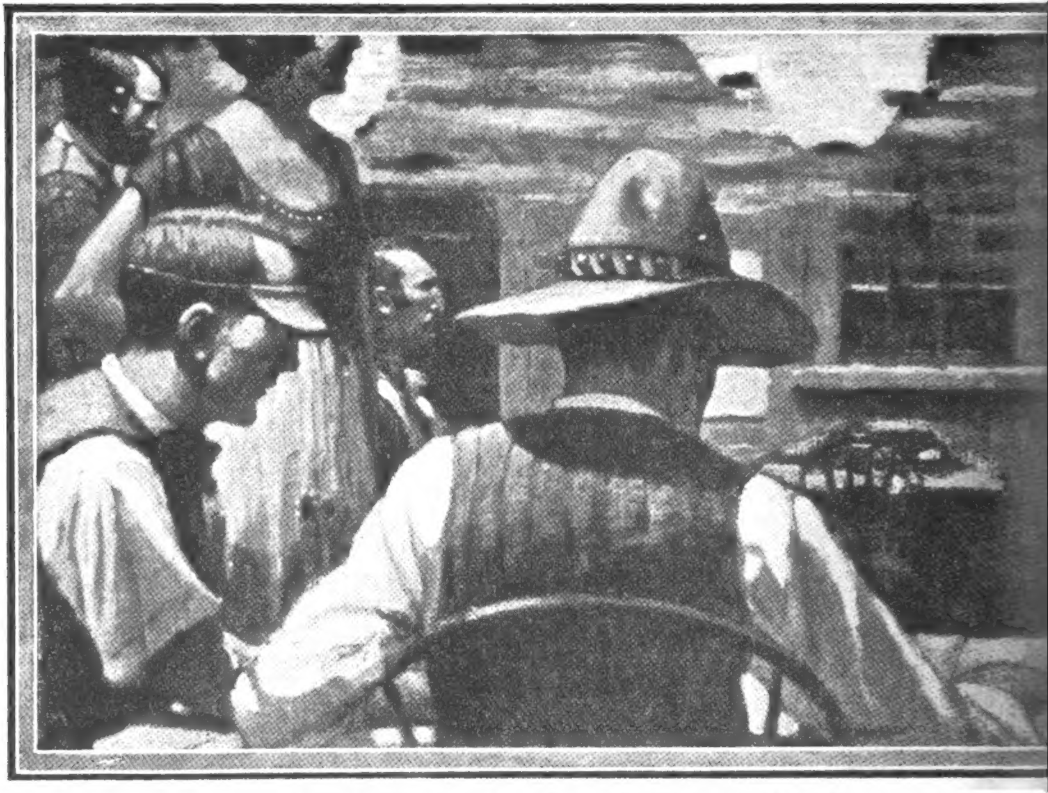


What feminine impulse, what whim had caused Mildred to sing the song that h

The Satisfactior

Laid in a Land Where They Play the Gan
There's Always Tense, Two-fisted Dram

By S. B. H

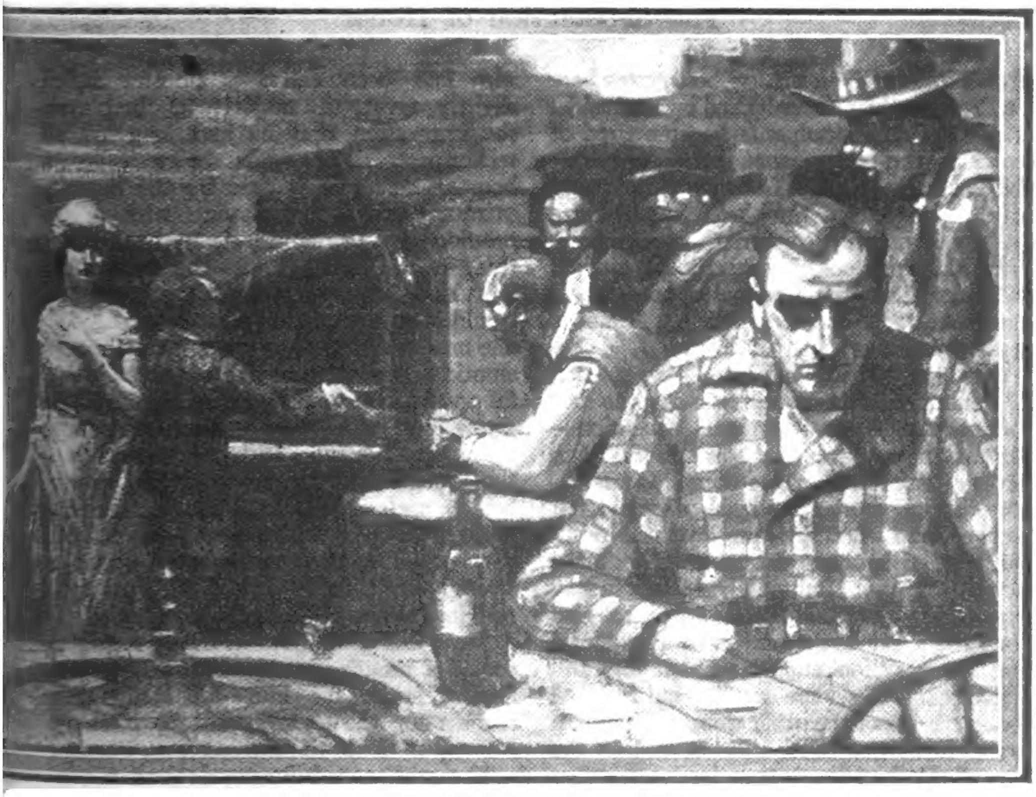
LESS than a quarter of a century ago these men and women were tangled in the web of circumstance of the "Old West," where open gambling was regarded as a necessary adjunct to life, and where there prevailed a somewhat distorted idea of chivalry which was often manifested in action almost grotesque.

All these old friends have quit the game and cashed in. I hope they were winners, and that the great Dealer has none of their tabs in his drawer which they failed to pay.

They may have lacked somewhat of refinement, but they accepted their losses as cheerfully as they took their winnings. Never did I hear one of them whine or complain. Never did I hear one of them say that the game was not "on the square."

A long room, furnished with the paraphernalia of Chance. Faces of men, flushed or strangely pallid. A tensed, strained atmosphere. Drink and the reek of it. Many lights. Tobacco smoke—fantastic incense upon the altar of the Goddess of Fortune. A drone of voices, broken sharply by the calls of the dealers.

"Craps and the money once!" His fat heaving cheerfully, Al Bean announced the failure of a perspiring dice-thrower.



eant more than any other to the professor of psychology in the days that had died?

# of Honor

A Novelette

Illustrations by Mead Schaeffer

Hard for Gain or a Woman's Smiles—Where When Opponents in Love or Cards Clash

Hurst

"Give 'em to me! I'm the baby that can roll 'em! That guy couldn't make a pass in a thousand years."

The embarrassed failure parted with the dice, dejected as one caught in deadly sin; while the player who had so loudly announced himself doubled his bet and prepared to throw with the air of one to whom is revealed many mysteries.

"Seventeen, odd, red and the middle column!"

At the wheel, Bert Cummings mechanically raked in the winnings of the house and began to pay where the house had lost.

The gentleman whose short legs reached not the floor from his high stool loudly shook his big "chuck-a-luck" box while a slight argument rose among the strivers at the stud-poker table, and "Everybody deals!" echoed from where many played black jack. The noise of the "professor's" manipulation of the piano in the extraordinary theatre adjoining mingled oddly with the click of chips and the clink of money.

"Big Bill" Hinkman ran both these places, and the door connecting the gallery and the gambling-room was never closed. The ladies who charmed from the stage with their voices asked but the privilege of "running the boxes" in return for the expenditure of their art. These boxes were tiny rooms; their doors locked on the inside, and when their occupants became tired of watching the performance they could draw the heavy curtains. There were so many of these boxes that the place reminded one of some weirdly distorted honeycomb. From the drink sold in these boxes to their admirers the ladies received a percentage, and since there was a sufficiency of ladies, much drink was sold.

Into the private affairs of his artists, Hinkman did not probe, for it was not necessary. There was one exception—Mildred never "ran the boxes." She had never even entered one of them. Occasionally she sang from the stage—when she felt inclined, and when she sang even the occupants of the boxes listened. The other women said that Hinkman had fallen in love with her voice, that she was "stuck up" and "had the nerve to pretend to be good," and that she was "fool enough to hope that Bill would marry her some day." Had Mildred spoken to one of the other women, Hinkman would have quarreled with her. For the love of this big, rough man for his mistress was akin to adoration.

The wheel turned; the dice rattled; the professor played; the struggle for gain and women's smiles went on.

AT THE roulette-table stood a slightly built, delicate-looking man who did not require spectacles to suggest the studious. For such a one to be playing the wheel seemed strange, not merely because of his appearance—for men with one foot in the grave gamble—but because of his seeming indifference to the winning or losing of his bets. He appeared to have a fixed idea, from which he could not withdraw his thoughts. During one of the minutes when all interest in the game had left him, his number won. Cummings paid the bet, eying his customer curiously, but the winner made no move to take his money.

"Don't you want it?" The dealer's tone was friendly.

"Er—oh, of course!" Nervously he moved his money to the edge of the table.

"Damned booster!" A player at the pale man's elbow voiced this statement loudly. Cummings looked at him sharply, remained silent, and sent the ball round the wheel with a deft twist of his fingers. The man who had been called a booster smiled slightly, giving the majority of the players the impression that he had long lost all self-respect. For while being called a booster—one who is paid by the house to attract business by playing with money provided by the house—is in itself something of an insult, it was the tone of the individual who had voiced the word that would have roused the ordinary man. And one man was roused, but the latticework of emotions against which he reacted would fill a volume of inadequate description. He was a man with wide shoulders—a strange character, one who had not always been the "roughneck" he seemed. His glowing health and obvious strength made him noticeable. He looked across the table at another bull-necked individual—a man as strongly built but of a very different type.

"How about it, Casey?" he drawled.

"Aw; don't hit him!" Casey's grin revealed a mouth as wide as that of a codfish. "Don't hit him—it'll only make a mess for the poor janitor to clean up. Naw; just tickle the mean beast, Barney."

The man called Barney looked a question at the dealer.

"He bought a dollar's worth of chips an hour ago, and he's been playing 'em one by one," Cummings answered the question, his voice dry with contempt.

Barney grew rather red.

"And," he drawled, "the mouthy little Shylock had the impertinence to—to—insult my friend Casey over there."

Casey, in no wise annoyed at the mention of the well-known fact that *he* was a booster, continued to grin as one who anticipates great enjoyment, while the gorilla-like grip of the speaker began to close upon the right hand of him who had leveled the insult.

"Don't make a noise," suggested Barney, when the face of his writhing victim indicated the limit of pain borne silently; "don't squeal, because, if you do, you'll disturb my artistic friend, the professor, at the musical instrument next door—and he has feelings, like my friend Casey, which I do not intend to have hurt."

"Kee-rect!" Casey approved, while the other players appeared as uninterested as if the unfortunate squirmer were trying to entertain them and doing it very poorly.

"Yes"—Barney might have been speaking to a woman, so gentle was his voice—

"yes; like all artists, the prof cannot tolerate rivalry. If you holler while I am escorting you to the outer portals of this place, he will believe that another musician has been hired by Bill, the boss. Then he will quit, and we be left musicless. If you don't believe me, ask Casey about it. But be polite when you call me a liar."

The individual who had so readily insulted an apparently defenseless man was now hopping weird contortions on his knees. Lightening his grip somewhat, Barney commanded him to cash in, allowing him to struggle to his feet. The dealer made swift payment of a dollar and ten cents, which the victim's free hand grasped.

"Ye're takin' shingles off the house, Barney me boy," Casey chuckled. "Don't you see he's quittin' a winner?"

"I know," Barney's tone was sorrowful, "but I'm the helpless instrument of fate. If, by some odd chance, you happen to have ten cents about you, Casey—I mean ten cents which are not the rightful property of Bill Hinkman—then, I beg of you, toss the dime to Bert and ease my guilty conscience."

"I'll do it—for you." And Casey gravely handed a dime to the grinning Cummings, while the players laughed.

At the door, Barney released his shivering victim.

"Never insult a poor devil because he looks too sick to hit you. If you had said what you said to either Casey or myself, we would have patted you on the back and laughed. Go—and think it over."

NO MAN but the one he had protected watched Barney's return to the wheel. The recent happening, with all its appeal to brutality, had evoked only casual glances here and there from among the absorbed worshipers of the God of the Chances.

"We gents has to protect ourselves." Casey grinned widely at his fellow booster, teasing Barney by advertising the latter's reason for being there, unable to miss the opportunity of joshing his friend.

"We?" Barney grinned back at him. "We? Why, you're so darned lazy that you'd only grunt if some tough kicked you on the back of the neck!" At which atrocious libel, Casey only grinned the more widely.

Rather vaguely, not sure of the right attitude to take, it seemed, the pale weakling smiled his thanks, but Barney relieved him of the unpleasant task of words. For sympathy is a sometimes strange reaction; often the cry of an injured dog disturbs one more than the wail of a suffering human. Commandingly, as was his habit, a trace of contempt barely suppressed,

"Cash in—come and have a quiet drink," said Barney, and, with the trick of men born to command, he smiled slightly. Casey stared across the table and Barney's smile became a laugh. "Going to leave you, roughneck—craps is a less exhausting game."

"All right, my old college chum!" Casey retorted. Then, to the dealer, "You didn't know me and him went to college together, didja?" Cummings, with his mechanical nonchalance, sent the ball upon its uncertain journey, answering gravely:

"Sure! Only got to take one look at you two to know that—and the name of the college, too!"

"Yes?"

"Yes; but you was too tough, and got throwed out. University of the Second Chance, they calls it. Walla Walla is the pen's proper name, though. Most guys goes straight after leavin' there, but—but you two got a job here!" Casey's chest heaved with appreciation.

"Double green and nobody on it!" Cummings droned the ball's arrival, and swept chips and money from the table. "Casey's favorite number. He says green was his college colors. The stripes molded on him!"

"Why are you taking up with the little guy?" Barney's interest in the weakling was rousing Casey's jealousy.

"Oh—don't know exactly—he's a good talker and knows a lot."

"Why don't he know enough to keep out of here—where his sort don't belong?"

"He hasn't told me why he comes here."

"Hasn't *told* you? Say—are *you* crazy, too? Wotinell would he come here for if it wasn't to play the wheel?"

Barney frowned slightly. He was beginning to be annoyed at having become interested in the weakling. He was conscious of a puzzle which, after all, did not concern him. He answered Casey raspingly.

"Say—who's crazy now? Can't you see that sick-looking guy don't *play* the wheel?

He makes a few bets, all right, but most of the time he just stands there—dreaming about some damned thing— If he wasn't such a delicate-looking guy, I'd think he'd either killed a man or wanted to."

MORE than a week had passed since Barney had escorted the impolite roulette player from the table, and during that time he had spent as many hours with his protégé as with his friend Casey. And Casey liked being deserted as little as he understood the reason for it.

"Then why don't you ask him what's the matter? You hang round him just as if he'd hired you to beat up any guy that speaks to him. If he's such a pet of yours, why don't he tell you why he's such a scared little skunk? *I'd* make him tell—if there's anything—which there ain't."

Again Barney frowned. It was impossible to tell Casey that his roughneckism was mostly external—as impossible as it would be to risk hurting the weakling's feelings with personal questions. But Casey was not handicapped by any such refinements. And the weakling, in his timid way, was walking toward the "club-room," where the two boosters were sitting.

This "club-room" was a recess, furnished with a few chairs and a table upon which reposed some ancient magazines. It was almost always deserted. Compared with the glare of light about the gambling-tables, the gloom of the place held a certain restfulness. Not until he crossed the curtained threshold did the weakling know the place was occupied. He hesitated, but Casey hailed him.

"Come on in, you—we want to ask you something."

The weakling obeyed mechanically. Barney shifted restlessly in his chair. He wanted to silence Casey, but he liked the man far too well to quarrel with him. He was curious, too, to hear what reply the weakling would make to Casey's blunt questioning.

"Have a seat. Me and Barney has been wonderin' about you. You don't come here to gamble, and you ain't man enough to take care of yourself. Are you writin' a fool book, or what's your little game? You ain't even told Barney your name, and he's too darned soft to ask you. If you was a girl——"

"Cut it out, Casey!"

Casey's wide mouth became a just visible line. For some tense moments there was silence in the club-room, while the noise from without surged like waves. Casey had turned slightly pale; Barney was even paler. Casey's growing impulse was to manhandle the weakling, but he somehow controlled it and, studiously avoiding his friend's eye, went on quietly:

"Why don't you tell us what's troublin' you? Us is your friends. Neither him or me ever refused to go down the line for a friend."

"It seemed too much to ask." The weakling did not look at Casey.

"What did?"

"I did not have my problem solved—not entirely, that is—until yesterday. I will admit that I wanted to confide in Mr. Hilliard days ago, but I was somewhat diffident. But now the time seems near, I will require some help. You were kind enough to say you were my friends—will you help me?" There was a sort of dignity about the man—a dignity, however, heavily drenched with pathos.

"Help you? Sure we will!" Casey's hand went to a ready, if light, pocket; but Barney Hilliard shook his head at him.

"I don't believe it's that," he said gruffly.

"No?" Casey, having sampled the content of his pocket, seemed relieved.

"No. He's going to tell us all about it—now."

Silence. It was difficult. But the urge for revenge broke through diffidence, helped materially by craving for sympathy, half hypnotized by long dwelling upon great sorrow. The cultured voice broke the silence; the man's eyes focused upon pictures not hanging upon the walls.

"I am going through with it. Five years ago I was professor of psychology at the University of—it does not matter. I was the youngest man ever to hold that chair. I was young enough to fall in love—I am thirty-three now. I fell in love with a girl who attended my lectures. We were married. She believed she despised muscle and admired brains. She was mistaken. Many women make the same mistake. They discover their mistake *after* marrying the brains. She left me without saying good-by."

The voice lost something of its lecture-room tone. The professor of psychology was perilously near succumbing to emotions he had often discussed learnedly and somewhat contemptuously.

"Yes—she went away—without a word—just like they do in plays and books of fiction. You can both understand—my—And neither of you is capable of greater feeling, stronger passion than I am. She would not have run away from either of you."

"She'd have been dragged back by the hair of her head if she had," growled Casey, red of face. "A guy's wife is——"

"Let him finish," Barney interrupted.

"And then," the professor of psychology continued, slowly and less evenly, "then she met a man who—who— Well, I find it helps me to plan on my revenge when I play the wheel. Because I am going to have my revenge. It will taste very sweet after this waiting. And I want you two to come with me and see me take it."

His frail body shook with agony now, and the two powerful men reacted like wounded gorillas.

"You shall have it! You've a right to kill the swine, anyway—to kill 'em both!" The quiet had left Barney.

"Kill 'em both!" Casey echoed fiercely.

"I *cannot* kill. I do not desire to kill. Besides, to kill a man is to end his troubles, his pain. I want a far more cruel revenge than killing him—and revenge must be cruel to be complete. A man unable to think can kill, but I, with the brains she despised, have found a way to make them both suffer hell. Yet I need your help—your fighting help—at least, it seems so."

"Where is he?" Casey pressed.

The weakling paused. Over and over again he had repeated to himself the words he was now to utter aloud—this to gain control, to prevent his voice rising in a shriek when he said those words. And now he answered, as if he were telling the time of day,

"Mildred is my wife, and Hinkman is—" But the professor of psychology had overestimated his fortitude, and Barney, with swift understanding, hustled Casey into the gambling-room while the weakling sought to recover what manliness he might.

Casey, dumb with the surprise of the revelation, stared at his friend, open-mouthed; but Barney, no less astounded but fond of carrying off difficult situations with cynical speech, drawled:

"Friend of my declining years, what think ye? If we do not more or less boost, we are liable to be urged to seek other—er—vocations."

AND now incidents, puzzling during the past week, began to make for solution of the greater problem in the mind of Barney. He had wondered why he could not persuade the weakling to go with him into the adjoining theatre. Now he knew that the ex-professor feared that Mildred might make one of her rare visits to the place and recognize him. Therefore, she did not know her husband was in the same town. It followed, then, that Hinkman would not know the husband if he saw him. Barney knew that Hinkman adored Mildred. The subject of her husband would be tabu between them. Consequently, Hinkman would not even possess an inadequate description of the weakling. The ex-professor must have reasoned all this out. But how had he trailed his wife?

It helped him to plan his revenge to play the wheel! Barney did not believe this obvious lie. The man craved his wife, and the wheel allowed him an excuse—to himself—to be as near her as he could get without her being aware of his nearness. God, how the poor devil must have suffered! No wonder he forgot his bets.

And neither Hinkman nor Mildred guessed what was coming. But what could such a weakling cause to come—that would count?

But Casey, after the manner of his type, could dwell but a little while upon any problem. Novelty interested; study bored. However, a sudden happening in the gambling-room would have affected any one.

"Hello!" Casey began to move rapidly. "Bert's got another spell!" They pushed roughly through the crowd gathering to stare at Cummings, the dealer, whose saturated handkerchief weakly tried to stem the hemorrhage. Dying of tuberculosis, his will and an attitude of jest toward life had kept him at work. An excited booster from the stud-table had sprinted to Hinkman's private quarters, and, as many hands helped to carry away the man who had for the last time called the winning number and who would not jest overlong, Hinkman strode into the room. He stood, a huge man, not fat. His face might have been carved out of teak-wood with an ax by an inartistic savage. Yet there was a quality in that face, in addition to great strength. He made no fuss over Cummings, but the few men and women who really knew Hinkman could have told you that the dealer would lack nothing, and that he could have quit long before and still drawn his five dollars a shift. As the bearers carried their burden through the door and the gamblers returned to their places, Hinkman spoke, his deep voice unmoved.

"Take the wheel, Barney." And turned on his heel and went back to Mildred.

AT THE terse command, Barney had stiffened with anger when normally the promotion would have pleased him. For promotion it was, with more pay; and it effectually precluded the possibility of his again being a booster in that house, since the booster's connection with the house is not supposed to be known to the patrons. And Barney loathed the booster's job.

Hitherto on good terms with "the boss," his curious sympathy with the weakling, allied with the latter's confession, now surged through him as intense hatred of Hinkman. Fanning this flame was his knowledge that behind it all was that animal antagonism toward the successful male which hypercritically finds ethical expression. Men curse the man who "breaks up another man's home," when nine out of ten of them, given the courage and opportunity, would have done exactly the same thing! Besides, Hinkman had not taken Mildred away from the weakling, and it was not unlikely that the repression of the feeling of self-contempt in the late occupant of the chair of psychology had allowed the urge for revenge to take its place. So, Barney stood, swayed between his mental appreciation of the situation and the atavism within him which had so often dragged him down to hell. The atavism, as usual, won.

"Run the wheel a minute, will you, Casey?" His rage made a parody of his drawl, his voice sounded uncouth. Casey stared at his friend. For a booster to run the wheel, and thus advertise his position—even if it were generally known—was sacrilege. And Hinkman would not tolerate such.

"Then," Barney added, sneering, "let the damned thing run itself—I'm busy."

Casey did not answer. With his disconcerting scowl he subdued a few grins among those waiting to play, and twirled the ball round toward its destiny with as debonair a skill as that of Cummings. Barney returned to the weak if disturbing intrusion into his weird life.

"Well, what are you going to do?" he asked, vainly struggling to bring his voice back to normal, his question implying many things. The weakling stared, fascinated by the heat of a rage he had so often tried to kindle in himself. "I'll tell you, then, mister man of science. You may think it'll be a gorilla fighting an elephant, but it won't—because the gorilla don't know enough to hit the elephant just below where its ribs meet—if elephants have such places. What I mean is that I am going to Hinkman's rooms. When I get there, there'll be a lovely scrap. *You* don't need to see it if your stomach's weak. *She's* liable to be there. After it's over, I'll take Casey's tip and drag her out of there by the hair of her head. I won't hurt her, of course. Then I'll see the two of you on the boat for Seattle. A hell of a Cupid, I am! You'll have the rest of your life to tame her into loving her lawful husband. At any rate, you'll have her."

The weakling had risen from the one deep chair of the club-room. To Barney's surprise, the man faced him.

Like the breaking string of a violin—born of God only knows what hours of lonely hell, came the words:

"I don't want her, Barney!"

Barney sneered; a curse—one tremendous, meaning-filled word—escaped him.

"No; you understand." The weakling, himself misunderstanding, hastened to explain: "I am not trying to be unselfish. It's my revenge!"

"Please"—the drawl had returned, drenched heavily with sarcasm—"please elucidate. You see, I am merely a human being who will never even see the angels, let alone sit at their feet and learn—er—correct behavior in—er—certain distressing situations. But don't imagine that I am jealous."

"I am going to get even." The professor was being lost in the tortured man.

"All right; suit yourself—but—but *I'm* going to lick Bill Hinkman or *he's* going to kill me!"

"You are not!" The words hit Barney like a bullet, unexpected.

"And who, if I may be permitted to ask, who is going to stop me?"

"I am."

"Well"—and Barney's sneer was neither pretty nor becoming—"well, be as gentle as you can. You wouldn't hurt me, would you?"

The weakling actually smiled, and, as sure of himself as when lecturing to a class,

"Don't forget, Mr. Hilliard, that you were not born the—er—the sort of person you so carefully simulate."

"Be good enough to quit stirring up my past. And get whatever is there off your chest—if you've anything to get."

"What would *you* do if in my place?"

"In *your* place—*me?*" If Barney had ever been a gentleman, he now showed no trace of it. "Why, if—oh, don't be a damned fool!"

"So! And if you condescended ever to fall in love with a woman—the sublime, as it were, descending to the ridiculous—if such an accident occurred, she would at once bow down and worship you. Further, she would never cease to love you. In fact, she could not. It would be a perversion of natural law if she did. Such miracles do not happen. The lady would never even think of another man—she could not! She simply could not, could she?"

The professor stood his ground. He had watched the anger flame into agony in Barney's eyes, and had risked the blow or whatever reaction came. But he knew that he had science behind his words, his knowledge of the man he had studied.

For in Barney's life there existed one sacred thing—one memory which had the power to bow his head. He bowed it now. He was walking down the corridor of the past, staring with aching eyes at the pictures on its walls. He was in the temple of his religion, in the sanctuary of his goddess. Anger was not permitted in that place. Automatically, he discarded his weapons at the entrance. The pictures merged into one, and the face, the smile brought a tightness to his throat. Barney Hilliard, more or less roughneck, turned to stare dimly at the distant faro layout. For full three minutes he did not speak. The weakling waited expectantly. Then,

"Tell me what you wish to do, and, if you want me, I will help you."

"Thank you. And, if you conveniently can arrange it, I think it will be well to have Mr. Casey there, too."

"When?"

"Immediately."

"The wheel"—Barney managed his drawl—"the unfortunate wheel of fortune—whatever will become of it?"

"Will you go with me now—to Hinkman?"

"And I am not to start anything?"

"Please do not."

"Oh, very well! Let's hike." And Barney strode to the roulette-table, the professor of psychology following.

"Casey, there's a minister waiting to interview us. He wants a new curate. Shake the stigma of the wheel from your dissolute fingers and come with me."

Casey merely beckoned the employee of the house who officiated at the poker-table.

"Close up," he commanded. "Hinkman says the wheel pays more than the rake-off at poker. Run the wheel till I come back."

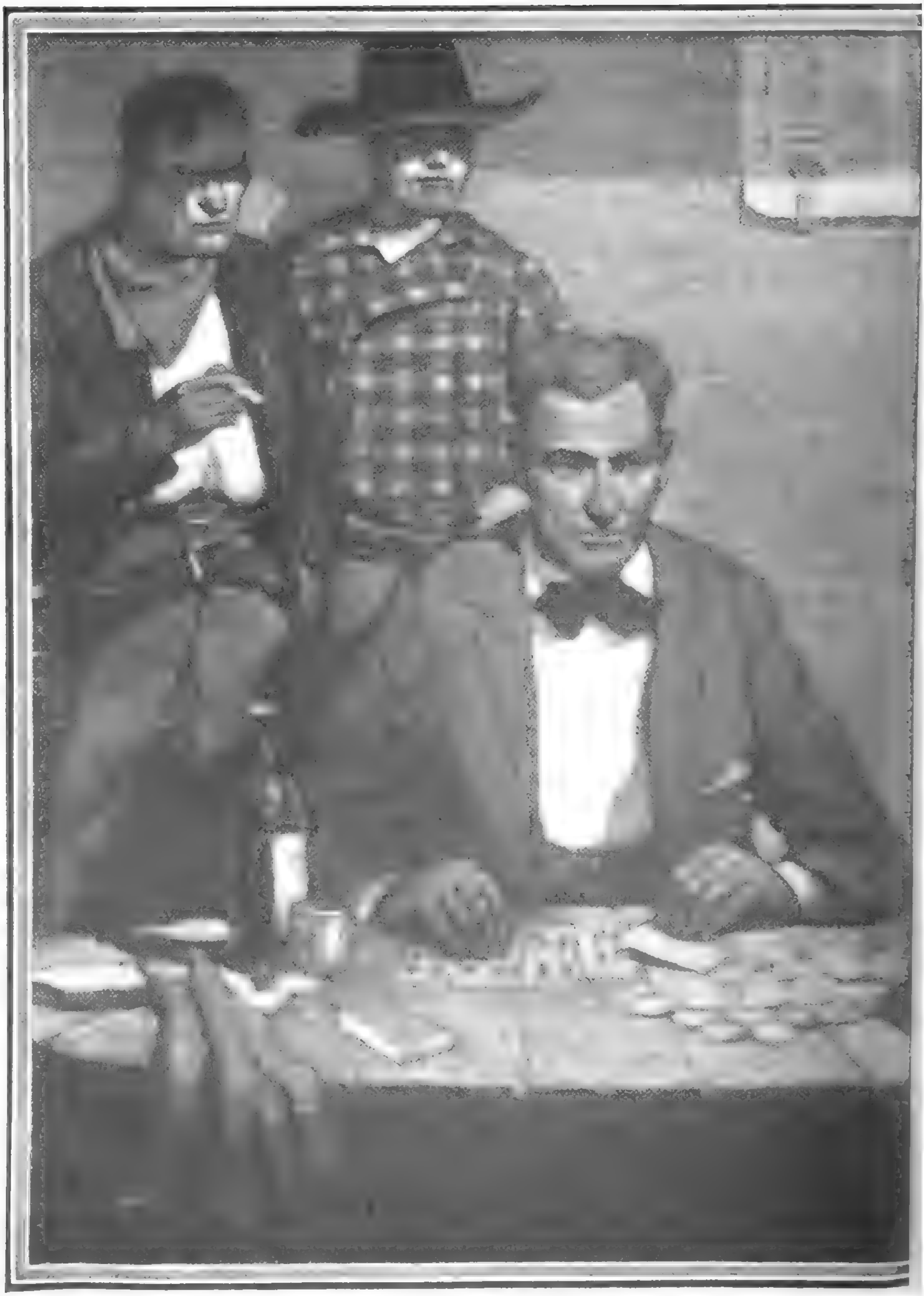
And before the astounded man could voice his objection, Casey had followed Barney and the weakling.

TO THE cynical Barney, that walk along the long, empty passage brought pleasurable anticipation of the coming explosion, but an inability to imagine the weakling as the fuse leading to it. For what could the poor devil do—or, rather, try to do? The David-and-Goliath business was more theoretical than actual. Oh, well, he could take care of the little——

Barney Hilliard paused in his stride, and, behind him, the others stopped. Intent upon the coming drama, the change from strident jangle to softened melody, the effort of the "professor" at the piano to be really a musician, simple as was the tune, had not been noticed. But now they stopped. Even Casey found the emotions somewhat unearthly.

"Answer me a question, love, I pray;
My heart for thee is pining day by day——"

That voice had power to make the beer-slingers stop in their tracks and silently stand between tables while customers forgot



Hinkman felt certain that he had the better hand. Over him surged a desire to call the bet, to

reak the professor and have done. He could not lose. The husband had only two small pairs.

to empty their glasses. It was heard but rarely, but even the most calloused spirits drew from it a touch of that agonizing ecstasy which music has the power to bring to humanity from the divine.

"Hold me close, as you were wont to do."

Casey had stepped to Barney's side. Neither man felt that he cared to turn his head to where the ex-professor of psychology stood alone.

"Whisper once again the story old,
The dearest, sweetest story ever told!"

Barney gripped Casey's wrist. In the dim light of the passage they looked at nothing. Their feelings were those of a strong man at his mother's funeral. That this song, with all its appeal, its tender asking of intimate memory should be heard now—this was terrible. The emotions of the professor of psychology, who had so bravely lied when he told Barney that he did *not* want Mildred— There are no words!

"Tell me that you love me!"

Something must be done, but neither Casey nor Barney felt capable of doing anything. They might wait until the song was ended. Yes; that appeared to be the only thing to do. But in what shape would the unhappy weakling be by that time?

"Nice song, but we have something more important to do than stand listening." There was never a tremble in the voice of the weakling saying this, and, with a deep feeling of thankfulness, Barney believed that the professor had failed to recognize the voice of his wife. Had Barney thought for a second, he would have seen the folly of this belief. But he was like a man drowning and clutching at straws, a sea of emotion surging all about.

So they went on, drinking in every note, every word—Barney again in the lead, his pantheresque stride making no sound. Anger born of sympathy—and other emotions—was coming back. He was even annoyed at allowing himself to be so affected by the song. And what could the weakling do? Nothing. He, Hilliard, must do whatever there was to be done. Justice! Yes; he would hold a sort of court. Casey should be the jury. He grinned.

"For that's the sweetest story ever told!"

"The hell it is!" Again fighting to control his emotion, Barney reached the open door of Hinkman's room. What he saw roused in him cynical amusement, gratified his anger. He lifted an imperative hand, and his companions stopped just outside the radius of the light shining through the door.

"Oh, tell me that your heart to me is true,
Repeat for me the story ever new;
Whisper once again the story old,
The dearest, sweetest story ever told.
Tell me that you love me——"

Pealing like an anthem of angels from that stage of dirty jests and lewd actions, sweeping it as the clean breath of heaven might sweep plague from earth, it reached Bill Hinkman, as it was meant to do, sitting close to his open door, the better to hear it. It was his rapt expression that had amused Barney, who knew quite well that Hinkman saw nothing but the dream-face of Mildred, heard nothing but the song. For it was Hinkman's favorite song, and he had asked Mildred to sing it, begging the pleasure with an almost Launcelot-like courtesy. But before Mildred had gone down to the stage, he had, in a few well-chosen words, explained to the "professor" just what unhappiness would befall him should he fail of correct accompaniment. And now Barney, staring through the door, saw Hinkman's harsh face lighted, as one may see a bleak, cold Cape Horn sea touched for a moment by a stray beam of the sun and glorified.

"Whisper softly, sweetly as of old,
Tell me that you love me—
For that's the sweetest story ever told!"

Then the fighting instinct told Barney that Hinkman was at his weakest. Now, if ever, was the moment for the weakling to tackle him. He was dreaming. In all the world he saw nothing but Mildred. It was the moment for her husband to make his appearance, seeking revenge!

ALL the best in Hinkman was surging into the pictures of his dream. Yes—as she had suggested—he would sell out, give up this dirty way of making money. Then they would go far away, where no one knew them—where there were flowers, mountains—no noise—where they could live and love and— No conventions, few scruples, little of ethics had hampered Bill Hinkman's climb of life; but now, through the radiance of his vision crept a shadow, dimming the joy of that longed-for future with Mildred. He knew life, and the gambler in him reacted to the "hunch." Yes; bury themselves as they might, in some way their story would out. And then? Then the long-necked creatures who were not fit to breathe the same air as Mildred would speak of her as "a wicked woman." And what if there were any—Hinkman actually shivered. Then he smiled sternly. After all, *she was the woman.* Only the impossibility of marriage stood between their happiness and "respectability." The rottenness of custom! And those swine who dared to speak so of his—of his girl would surely and swiftly find out what sort of man he was.

HIS grip grew tighter upon the arms of his chair. But—what about Mildred? How would she feel? Here, braving it, it was bad enough. To get away from all this, to be known as man and wife, and then to be— How could Mildred bear *that?* Even now she was smiling through tears. If that other happened, she would wither like a flower——

"For that's the sweetest story ever told!"

"Strange as it may seem, there is a *gentleman* here who wishes to see you." In his angry effort to be sarcastic, Barney drawled overmuch. The intended effect of the words was lost. Hinkman was merely irritated by the interruption. The implied insult never reached his consciousness. Wakened from his dream, he heard in Barney only an intruder who announced a visitor—some matter of business which could wait. All the world should wait when Mildred sang! Then, as he lifted his cold, level gave, about to say that he was too busy to see any one, it came to him that, as a messenger, Barney was distinctly out of place.

"Who told you to leave the wheel?"

Barney did not answer. He grinned nastily. Hinkman, sensing what was behind that grin, shifted in his chair—getting ready for action. Then he repeated his question.

"Who gave you *permission* to leave the wheel, Hilliard?"

The answer came like the strike of an angry cobra.

"Mildred's husband!"

The song was ended, with the theatre roaring for an encore. The patrons of the place would keep Mildred singing on that stage all night if she were willing, but she seldom responded to applause. To-night, however, she whimsically leaned over to the adoring "professor" and asked a question. He nodded, swallowed a glass of whisky, and began to touch the keys with an unwonted gentleness.

"After years of life together,
After fair and stormy weather——"

Hinkman glared at the frail, anemic creature who stood before him, surprised slightly at the little man's lack of fear and not troubling to rise from his chair. He knew, of course, that Mildred's husband was living. Beyond that he knew nothing. He had been content to love the girl from the beginning—from the day she came to the theatre, without knowing the reputation of the place, to earn a living with her voice. Yet, in some way, he knew quite well that here was the man—that Barney was not, for some weird reason of his own, running a bluff on him. Casey and his friend stood at the door. Hinkman's glare was replaced by a slight bewilderment. A husband seeking his wife's lover should not come this way. He could understand why—as he thought—the weakling had brought along the two husky employees of the house. But the rest was not according to Hinkman's conception of the Hoyle of the matter. He found himself suppressing a certain uneasiness. Thus, the silence began to seem heavy to the four men—*their* silence, as through the terrible situation Mildred's lovely voice, so ignorant of the looming horror, pulsed its glorious way.

"Counsel asked and wisdom given,
After mutual prayers to heaven,
Are the bonds eternal set
To retain us strangers yet?"

What feminine impulse, what whim had caused Mildred to sing that song? She had obliged Hinkman with his favorite, and now she sang the song that had meant more than any other to the professor of psychology in the days that had died. For a second the weakling forgot his surroundings. He wished he had been a poet, even if poetry did make emotional fools of people. Then he realized how emotion was taking charge of him, and pulled himself up with the rein of logic. But that song, as it had done during the brief while when he had tried to yield himself to the only god, Love, was searching every core of his soul. Yet he did not pause to think how it was that, facing Hinkman, the wonder of his wife's voice woke in him a hatred both new and pleasurable.

"—why ever met
If forever strangers yet?"

Softly, at the touch of the "professor's" fingers, the pathetic air came into the room. Then Mildred's glorious voice soared and throbbed in the final words:

"Strangers yet?"

"I wish to play a game with you, Mr. Hinkman."

Hinkman sneered brutally,

"Got a gun?" The big face expressed only contempt.

Barney, whose latent cruelty was causing him to enjoy the situation, and whose egoism hated to allow him to remain silent, answered:

"No, he ain't. Never had one in his hand in his life."

Hinkman's face hardened.

"I might have known, Hilliard—you're behind all this, eh? What's the idea?"

Barney, whose quick brain was solving the riddle, did not answer. As if he had not heard the question, he began to fill his pipe.

HAD Hinkman met the weakling in any situation but this, he would have brushed past him as if he were not worth notice. But this was altogether different. The gambler sensed a motive. The strongest man who ever lived could hardly have avoided some emotion—to such a "disorderly situation" it is well-nigh impossible to make orderly response, hence emotion. And sex was the stage-director!

Slowly, however, Hinkman found "naturalness" toward a man so weak that he lacked nerve to shoot, even to procure the only apparent means of obtaining revenge. No gun, and the body of an ill-grown boy! Again he spoke to Barney.

"Then what does he want here?" Hinkman laughed harshly. "Does he think I'll give up Mildred because he's a polite little guy that says, 'Please'? Does the poor little runt think she'd go with him, anyhow?"

Again Barney made no answer. It was, as he now saw it, the professor's deal. Let him have the cards!

But even Barney did not realize that the weakling controlled the situation, that he would not say a word or make a move which he had not previously calculated in reactions.

"For me to be polite, Mr. Hinkman, is as natural as it is for some men to be otherwise. *I am* going to play a game with you!"

"Game nothing!" Hinkman appeared to be about to get out of the chair. "Get to hell out of here—the three of you! Hilliard, you and Casey are fired. As for you, you poor *thing*, I won't waste any time on you—get out of here, quick, along with the two down-and-outs you hired to take care of you. How do you like playing nursemaid, Hilliard?"

"How does it feel to be scared stiff—as you are now?" Barney taunted, not stirring.

"Scared?" Hinkman looked more ugly than frightened.

"Sure thing! You're afraid the little fellow might beat you at your own game."

"You see, Mr. Hinkman"—the tone of the lecture-room seemed effortless—"I am going to play you for your most precious possession."

There was no trace of affectation in Hinkman's answering laugh.

"Hilliard"—he became sarcastic—"why did you feed this poor pup with dime-novel stuff? Get him a rubber pacifier. Or is it a girl? So—you read a book to him, did you? All about two men playing cards for the woman. But"—he addressed the husband—"she's not yours to play for. You can't gamble with another man's money." He flushed with pride. "And Mildred's mine—I *won* her from you!"

"She is *not* yours, and you know it!"

"I've listened long enough." Hinkman looked past Barney. In a few moments Mildred would come through that door. "I told you to get out of here. I've been good-natured, but I'm through." His voice rose above the conversational tone he had hitherto used.

"I see that my reasoning was, as usual, correct." The weakling spoke very quietly.

"I felt very sure that you did not *love* my wife, Mr. Hinkman—not in the clean, decent way men love their wives when they *are* men. You know what I mean."

Hinkman's arms stiffened into bars of iron as he gripped the chair. With the spring of some great cat, Barney was at the side of the professor, Casey with him. But the weakling was unmoved—unless a slight smile indicated emotion.

"I think you quite understand, Mr. Hinkman."

"You've got him going," Barney sneered with pleasure. "You gave him the straight of it. And he knows it!"

Hinkman relaxed. His face cleared, and his manner told that he felt calm, at peace with himself.

"Do you *really* believe"—his tone became gentle—"that I give a damn what Mildred's husband thinks about my love, when *she knows?*"

The professor had waited for this.

"Then you cannot refuse to play me—when you hear my terms. They are"—the psychologist paused and pulled a large envelope out of his coat pocket—"in this." He tapped the envelope with his slight forefinger. "Here are affidavits, drawn up for me by my lawyer, and properly witnessed. He explained to me that, under British law, my wife would have to prove both cruelty and adultery on my part in order to obtain a divorce. These papers admit my adultery and my cruelty. It would not be necessary to have me in court. I understand, Mr. Hinkman, that you play stud-poker very well. I have recently studied the game carefully. I will play you at stud, 'freeze-out,' with one hundred chips a side. I am quite sure that I will win; but if I lose, these papers become your property. I also agree to leave town at once, and never to come within a thousand miles of either your wife, as she would become, I presume, or yourself again. If I did, you would have your remedy. But I shall not lose. I am not superstitious, but I am sure I shall beat you. If, on the contrary, you lose—and you will—my wife leaves this place and this town to-night—with me. And you never see one another again. Is that satisfactory to you?"

"And what"—the rich contralto broke musicwise in the room—"and what is this important conference? Settling the great affairs of great nations?"

SHE had entered rapidly, and the tone of the professor's low voice had escaped her. Hinkman's face contracted. Barney and Casey turned slightly, and she smiled in a friendly way at both. The psychologist remained standing stiffly, his back to her, and she did not recognize him. He would be the last man she could expect to meet there. She went by Casey, put her arms round Hinkman's neck and kissed his lips. Blushing slightly, and looking toward one she believed to be a stranger, half impishly, half shyly, she saw that the "stranger" was her husband. She turned very pale and leaned—almost fell—against Hinkman, who put his arm about her.

"What is—he—here for? Do you know who he is?"

"He's here to try to get even, I guess." Hinkman appeared to have full control of himself.

"Get even—how—what do you mean?"

"Oh, I suppose he thinks he's got a right to it—to revenge. Guess any man would."

"But how? He can't fight with you." The pride came back into her voice.

How closely the psychologist had succeeded in adjusting himself to the situation—thus inhibiting emotion—was something remarkable. His voice again found the correct moment, and there was no emotion heard in it.

"My stake is the packet of papers which will guarantee the possibility of your marriage. Yours is—separation from what you hold most dear."

"How could you keep us apart, even if you did win?" Hinkman masked all feeling under a casual manner. The psychologist actually laughed.

"I will take care of that. And I will drink in every moment of your separation with a joy that will never be sated. That you two are miles apart while craving one another, that your agony of love-yearning increases day by day, that death and even your anthropomorphic hell would be a paradise compared with your separation, if you were burning together—all this, and more that my science tells me, will be my revenge upon you."

"How could you keep us apart?" Hinkman sneere

"If you possessed my despised brains, you would not ask that question." The professor still spoke as from a rostrum. "I am not merely rich, I am wealthy—now. A matter of a legacy," he added, as if in explanation to his wife. "These two gentlemen"—he indicated Casey and Barney—"or others of my friends, if they do not wish, at a salary of a thousand dollars a month each will guard her. If you, Hinkman, dared to enter the state of Washington, you would be arrested. I would spend a million dollars hounding you—a British subject lecherously attempting to steal the wife of an American citizen. The lady would by that time be in some padded cell in a private lunatic asylum—or any other sort of punishment I decided upon. My despised brains—are my inferences—mere inferences of the power I could invoke, and will, to keep you two apart——"

"Don't have anything to do with him!" cried Mildred, for the first time in her life afraid of her husband.

Hinkman glanced at the sneering Barney and the scowling Casey. That the psychologist had convinced him of his ability to hold his revenge if he won the game was obvious. For the weakling was impressive in his calmly cruel determination.

"Don't play!" Mildred, who had been making a tremendous effort to hold herself, to imitate the poise of her lover, now threw her arms about him, sobbing. "Don't play! What do we care?" The tears streaming, she released Hinkman, lifting her head proudly, as if before the world. "Wife! *Your* revenge! The revenge of a worm! Why, I would rather be Bill's mistress for an hour than the wife of any other man forever. I would rather die of leprosy than touch *your* hand again. Stand farther away!"

"You weren't asked to buy chips in this game," said Casey bluntly.

"You Judas!" she answered.

"That's enough!" Hinkman rose to his feet. "If your husband was as big a man as me, and I refused to fight him, what would you say?"

"You couldn't refuse—you are no coward!" she answered.

"Then I play with him."

"What?" she screamed.

He put an arm about her very gently.

"You don't understand, sweetheart. Not now—but you would later on. He came here and gave me a chance at my own game—the game I play best. It's like offering to fight me with bare hands. Don't you see, dear? You say, 'Don't play with him,' just as you might say, 'Don't fight with him,' if he was big enough to fight. Then, after a bit, you would think it over. And if I refused to fight, if I did as you asked, you would begin to despise me, and end by hating me. Don't you see?"

"Hate—you!" she breathed.

"You cannot see it now, but you would. A man who won't fight for his woman hasn't any right to have a woman to fight for."

"But our love's a sure thing!" she broke in.

"All the more reason for me to make it sure—to protect you. A wedding-ring's the best armor-plate ever invented. I am going to play this game."

"You shall not!"

"Excuse me, gentlemen." He was the suave gambler again. "Come, sweetheart!" And he led Mildred into the other room.

HE WAS back almost immediately, his face impassive. He removed his coat, turned up his shirt-sleeves.

"There's cigars and drinks on the sideboard, gentlemen. Anything you fancy before we begin to play, tell me and I'll send for it." He hung his coat over the back of the chair, turned the card-table until the cracks in it ran between his opponent and himself. Both Barney and Casey lighted cigars; the opponents did not. No man took a drink.

"Turn the key in the door—will you, Casey? And, Hilliard, there's a dozen packs of cards in that drawer, the seals not broken. Pick one out, if you will, and take out the joker. Even if you were not here to watch, you know I'll play square. Will you count us out a hundred chips apiece? Professor, will forty whites, eight reds and two blues suit you?"

The psychologist bowed and took his seat opposite the gambler. Barney, self-appointed referee, selected a new pack of cards and counted out the chips.

"This game," he drawled "is stud-poker, straights and flushes counting, if you get 'em. Freeze-out with a hundred apiece. The man losing all his chips loses the—er—the game."

"All right," said Hinkman calmly.

"Let her go, then!" And Barney placed himself behind the professor against the wall, Casey standing beside him.

As they cut for deal, Barney could not avoid admiring Hinkman's attitude. He also admired the man's intelligence. Hinkman knew that, if he had refused to play, his two employees, or one of them, would have handled him so that there would have been but little for Mildred to caress. But had this probability influenced him? Was it not more likely that his great love had roused his own soul to greatness? With a shock, Barney realized that Hinkman was a bigger man than himself.

For a rare moment, Barney felt curiously ashamed of himself, and most unhappy as a consequence. To defeat his wife's lover—at his own game—that had been the weak but still atavistic urge behind the professor's actions. With his money, he could have hired men to cripple Hinkman, to do almost anything. No idea of fairness, *per se*, had prevented his doing this. Nothing but the craving of a weakling to be, as it were, a man, and win—as a man—to defeat his successful rival! And the weakling knew a joy in this which he had never found in logical action. Poker may be termed "a continuous adjustment of the individual to a rapidly changing environment," and he who can best do this is less disturbed, less emotional, more likely to win. Yet, of the many who play *at* poker, few there are who do not lose that desirable calm.

Hinkman knew this empirically, and he counted upon it. The psychologist had studied stud-poker carefully—with mathematical care, probably. But he lacked experience. He had never played for a big stake—at any rate, it was unlikely that he had done so. And now he was playing an artist for the one great stake of life! And neither man could buy any more chips. Once the hundred of either was lost, his opponent became the winner. It might take hours to end the game, for if a man were reduced to one chip he would get a show-down; and in many a freeze-out game such a one has eventually won out.

But, Hinkman figured, there was bound to come a deal when both the professor and himself would hold big—when the professor would overplay his hand. This was especially likely to happen after some hours of strain. Hinkman had seen it occur many times. In fact, most players lose through this very weakness, this lack of "cold nerve." Hinkman himself would play exactly as if the hundred chips meant merely the price of the drinks—he would come as near to this height of art as is possible. But how could the other attain this? Impossible! Even if he had had the training, his urge for revenge, surging behind that polite exterior, would fool him. Hinkman would play like a chess-player on the defensive, waiting for his opponent to miscalculate—aggressively waiting for that deal when the psychologist would overbet his hand at a time Hinkman had him beaten.

Both Barney and Casey had reasoned the same way, and both wished they had warned the professor before playing. Now it could not be done. Both men played with extreme care. The bets on every card dealt were made after much thought.

AT THE close of the fourth hour of playing, Hinkman leaned back in his seat and lighted the first cigar he had smoked since Mildred sang. He seemed comfortable and confident, for he had detected during the last few minutes an uneasiness the psychologist seemed unable to control. The strain appeared to be breaking him. Such a physically weak man, one unaccustomed to contest, was bound to go under. As the gambler watched his opponent, he felt curiously sympathetic. After all, it must be hell to be weak—so weak that a woman would leave a man for that reason. Hinkman felt a pang of unpleasant shame, although reason told him he was hardly blamable—the professor was so delicate.

The professor was dealing. He anteed one white chip, which left him with one chip less than Hinkman—for, after much fluctuation, the game had settled back into dead evenness. The psychologist dealt his opponent a card—face down upon the table. He dealt himself one similarly. Then he dealt Hinkman a card face up—the king of hearts—and himself the seven of spades. It was Hinkman's bet, his being the highest card in sight. The gambler looked at his "hole-card," and saw the king of clubs. Two kings "back to back"—above the average hand in stud-poker.

Indifferently Hinkman bet a white chip, which the professor saw. Dealing again, he gave the gambler the ten of spades, himself the seven of hearts. The professor bet five chips tentatively, or as if he doubted that Hinkman would call.

Hinkman simulated hesitation. It seemed obvious enough that the professor had bet on his pair of sevens believing the gambler held nothing better than a king high, and Hinkman traded on this for all it was worth. To have raised would have been idiotic—equivalent to admitting that he held two kings, since to begin a bluff in such a situation would be poor poker. Finally, after a full minute of apparent thought—so well simulated that even Casey and Barney believed that Hinkman was foolishly playing a "hunch," hoping to draw another king with which to beat the professor's pair of sevens—he called the bet. Again the professor dealt, giving Hinkman the king of diamonds, to himself the four of spades.

The gambler had in sight two kings and a ten. In the hole, which nobody but himself had seen, another king—three kings, equal in stud to probably four kings in draw.

The professor had two sevens and a four in sight. What he had in the hole was, of course, unknown to any one but himself.

It was a cinch for Hinkman anyway, so far, and it did not seem that the dealing of the fifth and last card would alter matters. Hinkman bet five chips, hoping the professor would foolishly stay.

For a long time the professor stared at his pair of sevens, and across the table at Hinkman's pair of kings. He tapped with his fingers upon the table nervously. At length, with sudden decision, he called the bet. Then he dealt the last two cards—a six to Hinkman, a four to himself.

WHAT followed seemed obvious enough to the other three men. Nervous strain had filched the psychologist's judgment. Excitedly he pushed every chip he still possessed into the center of the table. Barney almost groaned.

Of course, the two pairs in sight on the professor's side were better than Hinkman's pair of kings, and the latter had not manifested the possession of anything better. But, of course, there were many chances of Hinkman's beating two pairs. The professor had also bet his hand badly. If two pairs were the better hand, that fact would be known to his opponent—indeed, to him alone. To bet every last chip this way showed lack of thought. Two pairs seemed big, and unless the hole-card helped Hinkman, two pairs were big. If that happened to be the case, if the two pairs were best, why waste energy? *Hinkman would not call unless he could beat two pairs.* It appeared that the breaking nerve of the professor had tricked him into betting only upon the cards in sight, without consideration of what Hinkman had in the hole. And many a beginner will bet on two pairs in such a rushing, thoughtless way, especially when he sees nothing but two kings, one pair, out against him.

Hinkman was thrilled. The long-expected had happened. His opponent had excitedly bet on his two pairs, bet every chip he possessed, giving Hinkman all the advantage of position, and with three kings in his hand. The nerve of the professor had slipped. Hinkman had seen this happen often. But he appeared to think.

There was the possibility of the professor's holding a full hand—either three sevens and a pair of fours, or three fours and a pair of sevens. But, apart from the fact that full hands are exceedingly rare in stud, the professor had not played as if he held any such monster. Why had he not raised Hinkman's bet when the latter bet on his pair of kings *in sight?* If the psychologist had a full hand *now*, he must have had a pair of kings beaten *then*. And, altogether apart from logic, Hinkman had a hunch his three kings were good, and he felt that the other had bet on his two pairs like an excited girl. Still, the stake was tremendous. If the professor actually held a full hand, then, if Hinkman called, he lost Mildred. Was it worth while, considering what he had in the pot? Against this was that hand of three kings, and the almost certainty it was good.

Besides, one of them had to win, and it seemed to Hinkman that he would be hardly likely to have a better chance of breaking his opponent than the present one. Everything said he had the better hand, even the extraordinary bet the professor had made on his last card drawn. Surely, if he had filled, he would not have bet in that frantic way. He would have bet light, hoping, even if such a hope seemed unlikely of realization, for a chance to raise. Hinkman felt certain that he had the better hand.

Over him surged a desire to call the bet, to break the professor and have done.

In that moment, Big Bill Hinkman ceased to be the best stud-player in the town. To be able to marry Mildred! To make her happy! That divorce. Those papers. But for the presence of Casey and Barney, Hinkman would not have hesitated—*now*—forcibly to possess himself of those papers. All the suave calm left him. He wanted Mildred—as his wife. He even began to have visions of a scheme for getting her back, even if he lost. But he could not lose. The husband had only two small pairs.

"I call you. I got three kings!" And Hinkman pushed all his remaining chips to the center of the table with one hand and turned over his buried king with the other.

Casey gasped slightly; Barney contained himself. The game was over.

While Hinkman had been thinking over that last bet, the professor had sedulously kept his eyes half closed, his head bent. Now, slowly and terribly, his head drooped still lower, while Hinkman, who had the right to reach across the table and turn the other's hole-card, sat still, watching, glowing with victory. He was sure that his three kings had beaten the professor's two pairs, but the strain of waiting for confirmation was something few men could have stood.

Still the professor's head drooped. For one instant Barney had the impression that he was lost in thought; but he dismissed the idea with contempt. And then the little man raised a hand that trembled like a leaf in a gale.

"Poor devil!" thought Barney. "And he's sore with himself for losing in such a damn-fool way."

AT THAT instant the door opened and Mildred came into the room. Apparently she had sensed the crisis and had been unable to stay away. The professor raised his pale face and glanced at her. Then he looked at his cards. Mildred glided to Hinkman's side and put her arms about him. The big man's self-restraint broke in a growl.

"Well, what you got? Show your hand—I paid to see it!"

Barney started forward, but Casey remained quiet. Mildred saw the three kings and smiled. The professor rose to his feet.

"Well?" And now Hinkman seemed amused, his tone sarcastic.

"You won, of course, dear," murmured Mildred.

At that the professor turned over his hole-card. It was the four of hearts! He had a full hand, and Hinkman was beaten!

"O my God!"

The woman's scream voiced the emotions of three of the men. The fourth, the slight professor, laughed.

" 'You won, of course, dear!' " he mocked.

"That'll do—you!" Hinkman growled menacingly. "You win—now, what you going to do about it? But keep your mouth shut!"

But Mildred could find no such anger-relief. Before the men could guess her intention, she had flung herself at the feet of her husband, sobbing hysterically.

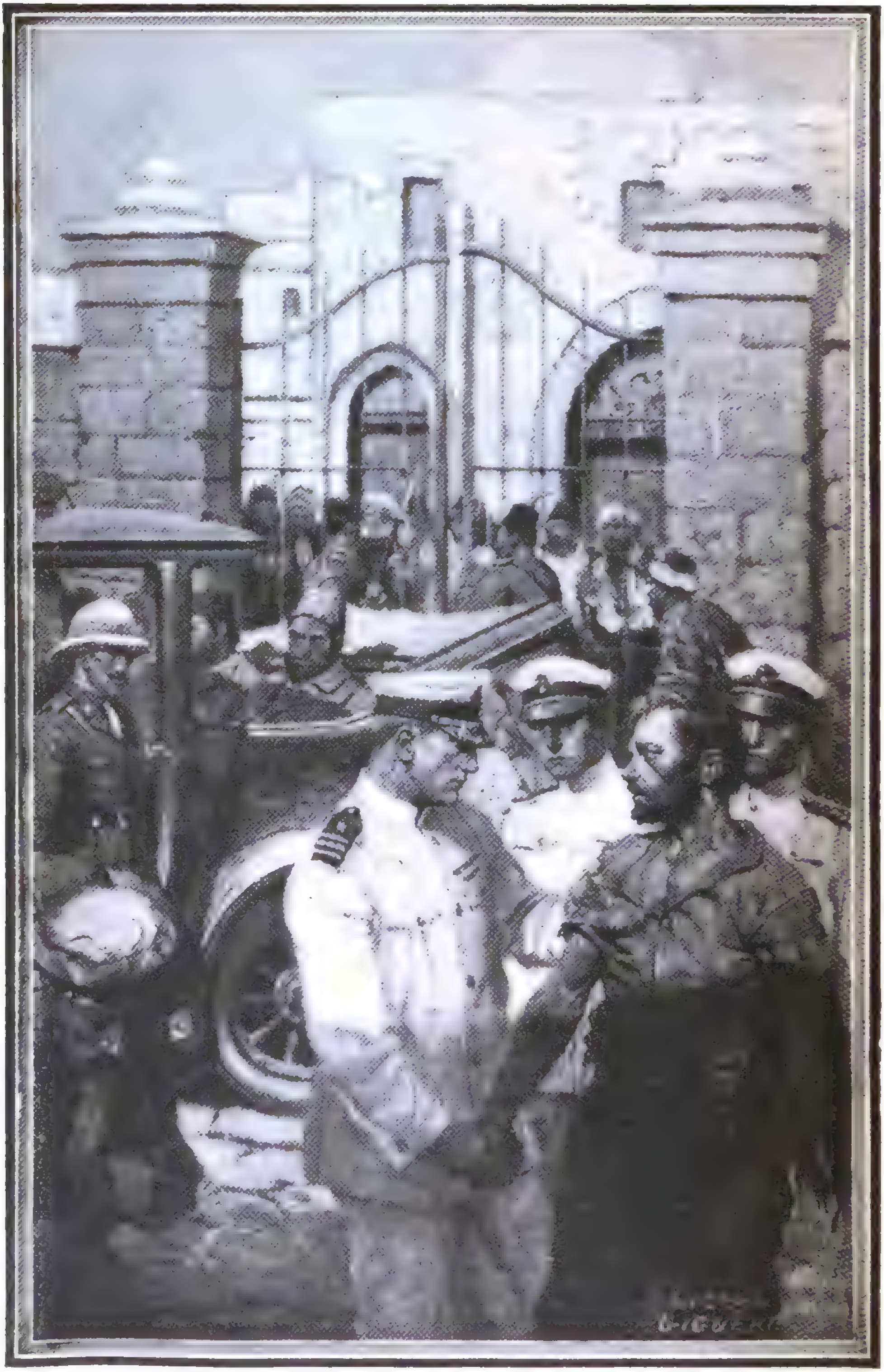
"Don't, don't, don't take me away! See! See, I'm praying to you. I'll do anything. I'll——"

But Hinkman had thrown aside his chair, his face flaming. Whether he meant to lift Mildred from her humiliating position or whether he meant to manhandle the professor was never known. Barney and Casey flung at him like a couple of wolves, holding him in spite of his truly gigantic struggles.

Mildred's beautiful head sobbed above the feet of the professor. Heavy gasping told of the men's dying struggle. The professor raised a hand that no longer trembled.

"Every repetition of the postulate vitiates the argument," he drawled ironically, "and infantile minds invariably believe their own assumptions before they get half-way through their discussions. You seem to forget that I came here to get my revenge. I had planned what seemed the sweetest revenge. I have won—but I never even dared hope for such a revenge as this!" And he pointed to the weeping Mildred, a contemptuous finger directed toward the bowed head.

Again the professor laughed mockingly, and Barney would have taken an oath the man was actually happy. Then he flung the divorce papers upon the table carelessly, as if they had no value. He walked to the door without another look at the people in the room, turned the key, and went out of their lives forever.



The gate swung back, and Lieutenant John Trask came out into the sunshine. He saluted Van Alstyn, but the American captain gripped his indescribably dirty hand.

By the Author of "Slave of the Pit"

Even That *Which* He Hath

What Do You Think Would Happen in Your Absence if You Were Put Down as Dead? What Would You Find if You Suddenly Returned?

By Bertram Atkey

Illustration by George Giguère

THE jabbering horde that had surged and eddied in one swift flurry behind the alms-grating of the Turkish prison perceived that the officer from the American battleship—for they knew mysteriously whence he came, though no man had seemed to tell them—had given them all the cigarettes his case contained, and so fell back for a moment to hover, like kites, round those heirs of fortune who had achieved possession of one, or part of one. A deft snatch in a Turkish prison has been known to repay heavily the bold man who makes it.

Thus, of all that ill-starred crowd, there was but one man, ragged, hairy and appallingly unclean, who, remaining at the bars, staring out, seemed at that moment an available recipient for the lone cigar which the commander produced.

"Here you are," said the officer, adding, under his breath, "And I hope you can appreciate a bit of good tobacco."

He placed the cigar in the grimy claw that clutched for it.

"Thanks—oh, thanks very much. Yes—I can appreciate it."

The American stiffened, his jaw rigid. English! Good English—from a member of that herd! His black brows knotted themselves in a sudden frown.

"Are you an Englishman?"

"Yes—a prisoner of war." The eyes of the man shone dully and then fastened themselves on the uniform of the naval man.

"A prisoner of war! But, man, the war's over — finished — long ago! Nearly six months. What are you doing *here?*" Under Van Alstyn's voice rasped a note of cold anger that was almost ferocity. "Who are you?

"I—was a British officer—yes—" The hands of the victim were trembling shockingly, so that the cigar fell to the earthen floor, to be snatched instantly by the brown claw of an Arab cutthroat.

"They—you know, they must have forgotten me," said the man behind the bars very hurriedly. "Perhaps—if you don't mind—if it's not troubling you—you could make representations—my name's Trask—Lieutenant John Trask, M. T. R. A. S. C.—captured at Kut." He drew in his breath jerkily. "I—I've had a baddish time—so, if you could——"

He appeared to think that the look on the other's face was one of anger at his request.

"Excuse my holding you up like this"—he poured it out with a faltering volubility—"but the fact is I'm a bit rattled, you know—and I'm not fit—but do please, for God's sake, do something——"

Commander Van Alstyn smiled—but it was not an attractive smile. Some men, and they usually are men indeed, smile when they are most dangerous. What remained of Lieutenant John Trask, M. T. R. A. S. C., must have understood the cold rage in the eyes of the naval man, for he thrust his filthy hand through the bars.

"You'll do it?"

Van Alstyn gulped back an oath.

"Do it? Make your mind easy about that. I'm not losing sight of you till I've got you under a civilized flag. You can gamble on that. Here"—he thrust his last cigar and a box of matches through the bars—"light that."

The prisoner of war, steadied by the other's resolute and cool confidence, lit the cigar and drank, rather than smoked it.

Van Alstyn turned and hailed two blue-jackets—gunners—who stood not far off.

The prisoner listened with strained intensity to the crisp, curt orders which the commander gave the two gunners, noted the sailorly way in which they received them, and then relaxed. All was well. This was business. There was nothing of the too leisurely East about these men. He realized that—and because he was a man of many disappointments, who had come through a bad and bitter time, the reaction caught him by the throat.

The two painful tears that, in spite of the utmost he could do to hold them, forced themselves through his hot lids, told Van Alstyn more than many words.

"It is only a matter of minutes between you and either the deck of an American battle-ship or the security of the British Military Headquarters," he said, as the gunners started off.

But so thorough, so ferocious and inexorable had been the breaking of the Englishman's spirit that, for a little, he could not wholly assure himself there was no possibility of error.

"You—are sure that there will be no hitch? You see, I don't think I could stand much more of this."

Van Alstyn smiled.

"You may take it," he said levelly, "that whether your military authorities move at once or whether they do not move until they have appointed a court of inquiry to consider it, *your* time in this particular Turkish hell is finished. I want you out of this—and I want you out *quick!*"

He rapped it out with the clean-cut decision of a quick-firer.

"Thanks—oh, thanks!"

Long before the cigar was half smoked there came two British officers in a gliding Daimler, together with certain Turks of position, the latter exuding nebulous apologies and very anxious to explain.

But it was the sea-fighter who dominated the affair.

"Explanations of things which explain themselves irritate me," he said to the suave and pliant official who appeared to be chief of the Turkish party. He pointed a lean brown finger at the man behind the alms-gate. "There is an officer of the allied nations who has been held a prisoner of war for six months after the signing of the armistice." Under his voice ran, like a warning, a panther-note that made the red-tabbed ones stare. "*Release him!* It is an *order!*"

The Turk fell away like a man afraid.

The gate swung back, and Lieutenant John Trask came out into the sunshine.

He saluted Van Alstyn with the most careful nicety, but the American commander gripped his indescribably dirty hand and presented him to his countrymen.

BUT all that was past and done with, and now John Trask was very near his home. He sat very silent in the corner of the railway carriage, staring out from the slowing train at all those well-remembered woodlands and downs, those familiar landmarks he had never expected to see again.

The train stopped and Trask stepped out—a plain Royal Army Service Corps junior officer without decorations, in a none too well-cut uniform purchased from a somewhat depleted ordnance department in southern Europe.

To him, with outstretched hands, came a handsome, boyish and very dashing officer of another type, another kind, in the uniform of an air-force major—his younger and only brother.

"Jack, old man!"

"Ah, Geoff!"

The brothers shook hands.

"Home again—after all!"

"Thank God!"

Their eyes ran over each other, and the young major seemed to wince.

"Come on, old man," he said, with something of an effort at breeziness; "I've got the two-seater outside." He turned to the porter. "Send the valise up by the next cart," he said, and they went out.

"You've been foully unlucky, Jack. I'm damned sorry. What were our people thinking about down there? I should think they would have had the sense to know that quite the first thing necessary after the armistice would be to search those Turkish camps and prisons. How did you get into a prison of that kind, anyhow—civilian jail, wasn't it?"

Trask shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I hit a man—early on—soon after Kut. One of those attached German officers. He asked for it for a long time—and got it. But I was lucky not to be shot. I paid for it—he saw to that. He got me separated from our lot and selected my prison himself. He stole my identity—saw that I was fitted out in the rags of a Turkish beggar. He made me a nameless prisoner—that American navy man was the first I've ever spoken to who believed I was an English officer. The German was killed by his own men a year ago. Still, it's all over now. It was just as well that battle-ship put in there when she did—I should have gone mad in another week of it. The scum in that prison! Geoff, I know—I lived with it long enough. I want to forget the beasts. You've got on. You were only twenty when I left England, weren't you?"

"Oh, things have come my way. I was second loot for a long time, knocking about on the Plain until I transferred to the R. N. A. S.—as it was then. R. A. F. now, you know. Since then I've worked mainly in the North Sea and the Belgian coast—over Ostend and Zeebrugge. And things came rather my way. I had the luck to get over a Zepp early on, and she brought me my D. S. O. The other things seemed to crop up. Of course I've had my moments—but on the whole my luck has been rather startling. It looks to me as if all the good luck that was reserved for the Trask family was dumped on me—and the bad on you."

The shabby lieutenant nodded.

"So it goes, Geoff," he said quietly. "But you've *done* things—and I've done nothing worth mentioning."

"Oh, that be damned for a tale, old man!" said the ace uncomfortably. "A man can't do more than obey an order honestly. How do you like the car? Late Nineteen-fourteen De Dion cabriolet coupé. Just done up. She's worth a fabulous figure now."

"She's a beauty."

The shabby lieutenant sank a little in his comfortable seat.

"Right-o! That's a comfortable seat, isn't it? Sanda loves to curl up in it. But she's told you about it, of course. She's not quite fit—a cold or something—nothing serious. I want to have a chat with you later about Sanda—later."

John Trask glanced sideways at his brother. Was it his fancy, or had Geoff spoken rather hurriedly—even a shade uncomfortably? He was looking straight ahead, driving carefully.

"All right. Do you know, Geoff, I haven't had a line from Sanda for ages—bar the telegram congratulating me at Taranto. After a few months I gave up expecting one. I guessed that I had been reported wounded and missing. I suppose everybody here thought I was dead."

The road gave, at that moment, on to a village street, with a wide strip of green, goose-cropped common on one side. Halfway down this common at the edge facing the road was a little simply designed erection in oak—as it were a notice-board with a little roof over it. Geoffrey Trask ran the car under it and pulled up before he answered his brother's question.

"Look, old man!" he said quietly.

The shabby lieutenant looked. He realized that he was looking upon the village shrine—the Roll of the Dead.

IT WAS a long list, a long, long list for so small a place. From among the familiar names inscribed there, one leaped out:

LIEUTENANT JOHN RODNEY TRASK, R. A. S. C.

His own name!

"That will have to be painted out," he heard himself saying. "Naturally."

It was very odd. It visited him with a sensation that was queerly blended of pride, of gratitude, of pain, of embarrassment and of relief. Now he heard Geoff answering his question.

"So, you see, Jack, every one presumed you had—gone west. Right?"

The hands of the ace suddenly left the steering-wheel, and he turned to his brother.

"Jack, I want to say one thing—before we get home. I want to ask you never to forget that every one thought you were—gone west—if—if—things should seem to be not quite as you think they should be."

The lieutenant nodded.

"I understand, Geoff. Of course I sha'n't forget."

"Just shake hands on that, Jack." The ace was strangely in earnest. They shook hands.

The local vicar, coming up, thought it was a grip to celebrate the necessity for deleting the lieutenant's name from the roll of the dead, and he came forward, smiling - a good-natured, broad-minded old man.

"Let me be the second to shake hands on it, Jack," he said. "If only one could paint out, one by one, those inscriptions! How are you, my boy? They treated you pretty badly in Turkey. We must make it up to you somehow—eh, Geoff?"

But his lips drooped ever so little as he spoke, and there was more of appeal in his voice as he addressed the young major than the situation seemed to call for.

"Every mortal thing we can do, Vicar," said Geoffrey.

"I am sure we shall—all of us." The old vicar stepped back.

The car stole forward and headed up the long hill to the wood-ringed manor that was home.

It was very quiet, wholly tranquil, on that sunny autumn day. Few were stirring in the village, for it was the hour before the midday meal, and the men were either in their workshops or in the fields. Here and there an old man basking on a door-step would cry a jerky recognition and welcome to the lieutenant whom they had known from childhood, or a woman snatching five minutes' gossip with a neighbor would smile and wave to the man who was *not* dead.

John Trask leaned back, absorbing again this old and peaceful atmosphere.

"Nothing changes, Geoff—it's as perfect as ever."

Afterward, that came back to him, edged and barbed: "Nothing changes!"

They were running now on soft sandy soil, between wide strips of rabbit-pocked turf, edged with turfy banks. Behind the banks were dense masses of rhododendrons, crowding under towering and ancient oaks.

A long curve unfolded for them the wide park, dotted with grazing cows; the lake, satin-smooth and steel-bright under the sun, and, lastly, beyond the lake, the old red manor-house set in a patch of autumn color above a double tier of green terraces.

Something caught the lieutenant by the throat as he gazed at all this which was his home. He could not speak—and Geoff said nothing.

So they drove in silence to the place where his people awaited him and perhaps, if her cold permitted, Sanda—Sanda—and all the love-giving, the love-receiving, the sheer joy of Sanda, who had waited so long for him, and for whom he had well-nigh broken his heart. Home—his own people—and his betrothed!

For one instant a pang of affectionate regret that his brother was not so richly endowed bothered him, but it passed, for that was equivalent to the moth, the dusty footman, grieving for the butterfly, the purple emperor. John Trask had no illusions about himself. He did not need to be placed before a mirror to know that physically, beside the good-looking, exquisitely groomed, plentifully decorated and famous ace, he loomed small. The R. A. S. C. lieutenant could never have hoped to win the resounding triumphs of his brother. That was in the nature of things—in the nature of war; he knew that.

The lieutenant smiled as he realized how little Geoff needed sympathy. Why, with his record, his dash, his personal beauty, he could select at lesiure a Sanda from among the very élite of the loveliness and sweetness of the country.

All was well—except for the fact of Sanda's cold and consequent seclusion, and perhaps—and perhaps—that omen of the shrine, if one believed in omens.

DURING his first twenty-four hours at home, John Trask learned that his death had meant more than an inscription upon a shrine. There were certain things that jarred a little, though on this, his first day, he did not go deeper than the surface.

And though these things brought a certain odd pang, it was not keen, nor did it endure for more than a space of minutes. He was not disposed to be critical. Indeed, he joked mildly about it at dinner on that first evening.

"Well," he said, reveling in the sheer physical comfort of his home and his freedom, "everybody seems to have made arrangements for carrying on without me. But, as Mark Twain said, the report of my death has been greatly exaggerated, and I insist on butting in again."

They laughed with him, Geoff and Sir John, his father. But they did not laugh very much, nor was their merriment quite comfortable.

And Violet, his eighteen-year-old sister, did not laugh at all. She flushed a little, and after a quick, involuntary glance at him, dropped her eyes to her dessert. Trask saw the glance.

"Vi isn't amused," he said, with a rather labored playfulness.

The girl looked up suddenly at that.

"Not a bit amused, Jack. But, oh, I am so glad!" she said impulsively.

Across the corner of the table they smiled at each other. And he saw that, though she smiled, there was only pain in her eyes—pain that he only glimpsed as it were in passing because of the sudden tears that dimmed them, and because she quickly looked down again to hide them. Geoff rose suddenly, glancing at his wrist-watch.

"Time I was off," he said. "I've only got fifteen minutes to get to the station."

He was reporting back to duty early next morning, for he was not yet demobilized.

"Is the car round, Mallow?"

"Yes, sir." The butler moved out to the hall.

"I'll run down with you, Geoff."

"Right-o, Jack!" He turned to his father. "Good-by, sir."

"Good-by, my boy. You think you'll be out of the service in time for the shooting?"

"Oh, sure to be, sir. Any day now."

The ace shook hands with his father, and it was with a pride that was almost arrogant that the older man stared into the eyes of his younger son as they exchanged grips. Never had Sir John looked at his heir with that expression.

"Coming, Vi?" asked Jack.

"Yes." The girl slipped her arm through his, and they went out into the hall.

The air-man raced the little car down the twilit hill through the village.

"You old road-hog!" said Jack affectionately. "You're doing forty miles an hour. These flying people think they own the earth as well as the air—don't they, Vi? You'll be getting run in!"

"Oh, everybody loves us," said Geoff lightly. "They give us—at least they used to—lots of privileges and things."

"And what they don't give you—you take," said Vi quietly—so quietly that, in the sudden grind of brakes as Geoff steadied for the corner, only John Trask heard what she said. But it conveyed to him nothing that mattered, though it stuck in his mind.

HE ASKED her about it when the little car was humming up the hill on the return journey.

"I was rather glad Geoff didn't hear you say that about taking what they wanted, Vi. It sounded rather as though you meant it, I thought."

"So I did," said the girl.

"But—have they really overdone it with the flying men? Spoiled them?"

"Oh, I don't know that—they were wonderful. And it seems rather mean to crab them; but some of them *do* expect full measure and overflowing. Geoff does, for one."

"My dear old girl, Geoff's all right!"

"He is not like he used to be." She spoke hotly. "He's only charming when he gets his own way. But he can be very much the other way when he likes. I know"—her voice dropped to an odd, flat note—"and soon you will know, too."

He looked at her, astonished at her sudden passion. She was staring at him. He could see that she was very pale.

"It's just a phase, Vi—it will pass. Things have been pretty badly unsettled. But they will readjust themselves. You wait and see."

He slowed the car as they approached the entrance-gates.

"Have you heard how Sanda is this evening, Vi?" he asked.

"Her cold is a little better. The doctor thinks it is not influenza," said the girl.

"Ah! Will you take the car on? I will go up there. She may be fit enough to see me."

"Very well, Jack."

He stepped out, and she moved into the driver's seat.

"Cheeri-o, Vi! Play you a game of billiards if I'm not back too late."

"All right, Jack."

He could not see in that dim light the expression on her face as, waving his hand, he turned away.

The Evesmoors, mother and daughter, lived about a quarter of a mile away, at Mistlands, a pretty, tiny place, belonging to Sir John Trask. They were not rich, but a moderate private income plus a widow's pension — Colonel Evesmoor had been among the very first Mons casualties—made them comfortable.

When they had first come to the house, every one had said that Sanda would inevitably marry soon. Her dark and glowing beauty, with the wide experience and charming tact of her mother, made that a foregone conclusion. Long before John Trask left England for the East, Sanda was betrothed to him.

Now he was going back to her.

HE HAD not seen her for three years, but he was sure, as he swung along the bridle-path, the short cut to her home, that she would be more lovely and perfect than ever. Brilliant, beautiful, an outdoor girl, a keen rider, with a passion for dogs of the sporting type and a hunting-woman's admiration for horses and hounds, strong and virile, yet she had her quieter moods. There had been many memorable pre-war hours in the studio and music-room, a beautiful little building in the park which Jack had erected with a legacy from his mother, and in which he spent most of his indoor time—hours when Sanda would seem to forget her sport and, like a resting Diana, would bask upon cushions, reading, or listening to him playing, or letting him paint her—wonderful hours that made the wet days welcome.

There had been many and many an hour when he had told himself that that was past and dead and done with, that there was no hope of ever again knowing those delights.

And now—here he was, walking again through the familiar woodland—alive, whole, sane—shaken a little with privation, but fit again, aged a little with suffering, but his own man, with his life before him.

Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death he had come and most miraculously all was well with him.

"God has been good to me," he said, and he could have sung—or prayed.

But as he entered the darker shadows of the strip of wood through which he had to pass before he came out at the gate to Sanda's, strangely his exaltation left him, and he was aware of an oppression. He stood for a moment, puzzled.

All these good things awaiting him—this superabundance—wasn't it too good to be true? Love, health, plentiful means, happiness—a vista of perhaps forty years of joyous life! And, out there, lying silently, silently, in their shallow graves, the hundreds of thousands, the millions—men who had been on the threshold of happiness—men who had had fortunes awaiting their disposition, wives awaiting their return, ambitions awaiting their fruition, children awaiting their coming—dead, all dead! Better men than he.

He thrust the probing thoughts resolutely from him and passed on into the wood.

"I only take what is given me. If it is good, so much the better for me. If it had been ill, I should have been prepared to put up with it," he said half aloud.

For a moment he was startled at the sound of his voice. And, oddly, there came to him a strange sense of having made a compact.

He had implied that he was entitled to enjoy the good to which he had returned, because, if it had been ill, he would have been prepared to endure it. That was it. He nodded; his mind cleared, and so stepped on through the shadows.

But there was to be nothing of the love of Sanda or of fond greeting or welcome that night.

The unfamiliar maid servant who opened the door told him that Miss Sanda was a little better but sleeping—and that Mrs. Evesmoor, too, had gone to bed.

So he came away.

He looked back at the house as he walked to the little gate that gave on to the woods. It was silent and dark save for one window—the closed and curtained window of Sanda's room. This glowed dimly—as if the room were illumined by some little, low light that was only just enough to ameliorate a darkness that was profound.

He pictured her sleeping—flushed and beautiful, with loosened hair—smiled a little, and went on.

Inside the room, Sanda Evesmoor, fully dressed, wide-eyed, was staring at the maid who was recapitulating exactly, word for word, all that Trask had said. Except for the dark shadows under her eyes, she was as lovely as he had pictured her; but it was not the loveliness which he had known and treasured, though he was fated to know this new, somber and subtly tragic beauty better, far better than the charm of the old days.

As he came out into the park, he glanced at his watch. It was still early, and there was time for him to go to his studio.

OF ALL places, it was on his studio and music-room that the thoughts of John Trask during the arid years of captivity had dwelt longest, and to which they had returned most often. He was of a different type from his father and Geoff, for he was an artist, whereas they were first and foremost sportsmen. For the music and painting of John Trask, along with his well-loved little temple of art, they had in their virile souls only a species of indulgent, lofty disdain.

John Trask had built the studio and music-room at his own expense. He had spent almost the whole of a comfortable little legacy from his mother upon it; he had designed it with extraordinary care, and, indeed, had worked upon parts of it with his own hands. It had been costly, but it meant to him all that Geoff's hunters and guns and the big racing car (bought with his legacy) had meant to Geoff—and perhaps more. For every taut and thrilling hour which Geoff had spent in the saddle, at the wheel or behind his twelve-bore, John Trask had spent an hour with his work, his dreams, his strivings for expression in music or upon canvas, in his studio.

After the place where Sanda was, it was to him the very heart of home. And now, quiet and alone—as at any time he would have desired it—he was going to reenter it, return to it and renew the tranquil joy of it.

But as he approached it across the short springy turf of the park, he saw that it was brightly lighted and he heard laughter and music there.

He was not surprised, for he remembered now that, in the midst of a flow of rather excited conversation, quick questionings and laughing answers that followed his home-coming, Geoff had said carelessly that the studio had been altered a little and was occupied, but he had not gone deeply into it, for there were his father and Vi with questions awaiting.

But as he drew nearer the studio, his spirits sank and the cold fingers of a coming disappointment pressed upon his senses like the first chill touch of an approaching frost. For he heard now that the laughter was raucous and the music was worse.

Somebody was singing a music-hall song of the most hackneyed type, and the strummed accompaniment was in keeping with the words.

It jarred abominably—worse, it cut like a whip-lash. Wasn't there room enough and to spare for this sort of thing elsewhere? John Trask was not a prig. He knew that the great majority of people liked this form of amusement, that it appeared to do them no harm, but, on the contrary, seemed, by some curious alchemy, to refresh them, do them good and send them, with a new vigor, to their work. After all, it was more or less harmless—but why should it invade his sanctuary?

He controlled without difficulty a sharp inclination to anger, forced himself to shrug his shoulders—after all, things could soon be rearranged—went up to a window, half opened to the cool air, from which cigar smoke was oozing, and looked in.

The curtains rendered him not easily visible from the brilliantly lighted room. It had once been his music-room—a large and lofty apartment decorated in a carefully worked-out scheme of soft, clear whites, yellows and grays.

He gulped and set his teeth as he saw how it had been altered. His anger surged up, swelling, but he thrust it down.

"I *must* be fair," he whispered. "They thought I was dead."

He saw that the company inside the room was chiefly of men; though there were four women whom he recognized—the wife and daughter of the trainer of Geoff's and his father's race-horses, and the wives of the steward and of the chief jockey, a fairly well-known rider upon whose services Sir John had the first claim.

They were enjoying themselves—a little coterie of the higher grade of Sir John's employees—the trainer, the steward, two or three of the bigger tenant-farmers, a couple of jockeys and the head gamekeeper—a man of weight on that sporting estate. There was whisky and soda going, cigars and—music. One of the jockeys had just been singing, and his humor had been successful. That was all. There was not an ounce of harm in the whole business—

hundreds of thousands of families were doing the same everywhere.

It was not very elevating perhaps, but it was very human and quite normal. The trainer, who, the lieutenant supposed, was now living in the altered studio, was giving a little musical evening. Only—it jarred.

John Trask stepped back into the shadows, sick with disappointment.

"But they weren't using my piano," he said mechanically. "That's something." He wondered what had happened to his piano.

He thought, too, that the studio was enlarged—a place that he suspected was intended for a kitchen and scullery had been built on.

For a long time he stared dumbly at it. And when presently he turned away, his anger had been conquered. It was gone—quite gone. But it had left pain in its place.

"They thought I was dead," he said to himself over and over again. "And Geoff wanted a house for Simpson." He remembered that there always had been an intention to house the trainer better some day. "But, all the same, *I* wouldn't have ruined the studio if it had been Geoff's. I suppose that's what Vi meant. And where are my pictures? And the collection of old music manuscripts? Surely they wouldn't have sold them—so soon——"

But there was no conviction of that in his heart as he hurried across the park. He knew, though he said with his lips that it was impossible, that his carefully acquired pictures and manuscripts were probably sold and dispersed.

Why not? He had been dead; his name was on the roll of honor, and—and Simpson the trainer had needed a better house.

It was late when he entered the hall. Sir John had gone to bed.

But Vi was waiting for him, curled up in a settee by the fire which burned in the big hall in spite of the season.

"Have you seen Sanda, Jack?"

"No. She was asleep. But she is getting better," he said, controlling his voice. "And I've had a look at the studio."

She slipped her hand through his arm.

"Poor old Jack!" she said, paused, then added, "But, at any rate, you will have the pleasure of putting it right again." She waited a moment. "I did what I could to—to—stop it, Jack. But they are so—impulsive." Her voice rang a little sharply. "Geoff should have warned you—he should have been frank. He could easily have told you that he had made a great alteration—and have offered to restore things." Her voice quivered with anger. "To have wrecked that beautiful little place for the sake of his horses and to have shirked telling you! It's selfish. He has been spoiled—spoiled!

He saw that there were tears in her eyes, and he laughed rather wretchedly.

"Dear old Vi," he said, "don't take it too seriously. It—it's of no consequence. There will be the pleasure of reconstructing it."

But she was too angry to listen—angry both for him and with him.

"Oh, you take things too philosophically, Jack!" she cried. "Are you going to be satisfied to spend the whole of your life reconstructing what should never had been wrecked? To creep about the ruins like an ant? You will find plenty of ruins! Jack, they have treated you—your memory—shame—" She stopped suddenly, catching herself up. "Not very well," she finished lamely, kissed him quickly and went to bed.

He stared, wondering. After a while, he sat down and took out a cigar, gazing into into the fire.

What had she meant by "spending the whole of his life in reconstructing"? Was anything else wrecked? "You will find plenty of ruins!" she had cried out. But he had possessed so few things capable of ruin—only his studio, his collection, Sanda.

A vague terror settled upon his heart at that.

Sanda? Sanda? Had she meant anything that could concern Sanda?

If that were so, then indeed he might as well have remained in Constantinople. He tried to thrust the thought away from him. But it clung. He rose and hurried to his bedroom. Impalpable as fear, cold as frost, his sudden doubt and terror went with him. Sanda?

ALTHOUGH Violet Trask possessed many instincts akin to those of her elder brother, she also possessed the fighting spirit of Geoff. She showed it at breakfast on the following morning, when, having carefully studied the handwriting on the envelopes of her letters and decided whom they were from, she had arranged them in a neat pile in the order in which she purposed opening them.

"It's jolly having you back, Jack," she said, looking up from her fish. Her tone was cheerfully careless. "There is quite a lot of reconstruction to do," she continued. "I suppose you'll take a fiendish delight in pulling down that ghastly kitchen Geoff has built on to the studio. And I am sure I shall—you'll let me help, I suppose. And father—you'll help kick the horrible place down, won't you, daddy?" She did not wait for an answer. "How appalling it must have been for you, Jack, last night!" She looked at Sir John. "Father, he went out quietly last night to look at his studio, and he found Simpson having a little musical evening with a few friends. Fancy listening to Griffen, the jockey, singing the latest comic song in the room where one had hoped to look through one's collection of music manuscripts again!"

Sir John winced a little, his forehead creasing, but said nothing. In his heart, in his very bones, he felt that the building in the park was for the first time being put to a sensible use. Music? Wasn't there plenty of room in the house for music? He resented the implied sneer at Simpson, the trainer — a good, honest, hard-working man who had probably been up at least five hours on behalf of himself and Geoff—and at Griffen, who in a year or two would be one of the finest jockeys that ever drove a winner past the post.

Nevertheless, he said nothing. He had long ago learned that the wise man speaks last. He waited for Jack.

But the soul and the spirit of the lieutenant was fresh from the hand of the Turk and his German overseer. Never too self-assertive, John Trask was now less so than ever. Those Oriental and Hun rough-riders of men had humbled him more than a man should be humbled.

He hesitated—hung—shirked the encouragement in his sister's eyes and said nothing.

Deliberately Violet waited for the comment from her father which her little speech had invited.

"Jack—of course, Jack must do as he thinks best," said the baronet, without enthusiasm. It sounded flat, and he must have felt it to be so, for he added: "I'm afraid you'll find a number of alterations, Jack, my boy—er—things gone and so on. It's due to that tragic mistake, of course. Your tastes and Geoff's differ—you'll have to talk things over with him when he's demobilized—meet each other—give and take, eh? Arrange about the studio—mutually. Meantime, draw on me for what you want—have a talk with Leigh. Yes; that's a sound idea. See Leigh as soon as you can, Jack."

Leigh was Sir John's solicitor.

He turned to his breakfast. Across the table Violet stared significantly at her brother—then began to open her letters.

BUT she had not finished. With the intuition of eighteen—often swifter though frequently less accurate than that of later years—she had learned how it was with Jack. He had been deprived of so much in captivity that he had acquired the habit of doing without even that to which he was entitled.

To her—fearless, uncurbed, high-spirited, with a passion for fairness—it seemed that Jack was in need of protection, until he had cast off the hall-mark of the Hun. She knew that he was longing to ask about the fate of his pictures and manuscripts, but either by reason of a supersensitiveness or because of the new, strange, nervous timidity which now characterized him, he was hesitating.

But Violet did not hesitate. She looked at the matter with the pitiless logic of youth. The things that were gone must be restored to Jack. She spoke bluntly.

"What are you going to do about getting back your pictures and music manuscripts, Jack?"

The lieutenant changed color, and Sir John winced.

"Oh, I don't know, Vi. I——"

The old baronet broke in.

"You had better see Leigh about them, my boy. He has full instructions about money. I believe they were bought by three or four collectors and a few dealers. It was a great pity." He spoke with an effort. "But nobody else understood the music manuscripts, and—the house is full of pictures already. If you have to pay the buyers a profit to get them back, don't hesitate."

"Thank you, sir—that's generous of you."

"It's the least I can do, my boy. It was a—mistake—to sell them."

"You will go to town, I suppose, Jack, to find them?" asked his sister. "Well, we'll have that beastly kitchen obliterated from the studio for you by the time you are back—won't we, father? I'll write to Geoff to-night."

Sir John rose.

"Settle it among yourselves," he said rather hurriedly, and went out.

"The poor dear simply can't help grudging the studio," said Violet. "He feels that any loft or lumber-room would be good enough for your collection. He doesn't mean to be grudging—but it's like sheer waste to him and Geoff. All the same, I am determined that you shall have the studio, at any rate, back again."

Jack smiled affectionately at her.

"What a wife you will make for somebody, some day, Vi!"

She laughed.

"Oh, I don't know, Jack. But I can assure you that I will not allow others to possess themselves of what is his—and only his—whether he is dead or alive—" She broke off sharply, flushing painfully, seized her letters and carried them off.

THAT day John Trask wrote to Sanda, explaining his absence and asking her to telegraph as soon as she could receive him. In the afternoon he went to London, there to recover all that he could of his dispersed collection. But he went without any zest or keenness. There was an oppression upon his soul—an oppression that grew.

Within forty-eight hours there had sprung up in his mind a great fear that all was not well with Sanda.

Why should she not have seen him? A cold? What was a cold to one who had seen men rot to death beside him with typhus, cholera, consumption?

There was a mystery somewhere—and he was afraid of it. He tried to think it out, but he arrived at nothing. He could not think as clearly as once he had been capable of thinking. He had lost the habit of deep, clear thought during his captivity. That was it—that was what was wrong with him, he felt. His physical needs and trials had driven him into the habit of thinking of physical things—rations, rest, clothing, water for drinking and washing, the misery of lice and vermin, the desperate and hopeless scheming for something approximating to cleanliness, and the pitiful strategies to avoid punishments and cruelties. A long, long course of such thinking in the dusty heat of the Turkish day and the fetid darkness of the prison night had temporarily atrophied his brain in so far as it was capable of considering the varying aspects and problems of peaceful English countryside life. That was the conclusion to which he came, staring dully out of his hotel window.

He saw, or believed he saw, now the reason why this oppression had settled upon him. He had overrated himself—he had expected too much.

He had come up, as it were, from the grave—and that had been a mighty matter for him, epic, overwhelming. But he could not expect all England to drop everything and throw up its hands in wonder and joy.

After all, it was such a little thing—the merest grain of excitement, of joy—one R. A. S. C. lieutenant salved from the millions who could never be salved. His people had thought him dead; he had been reported dead, and, naturally, they had made their arrangements. Now he had returned—upsetting those arrangements. If he were patient, not expecting too much, everything would be readjusted. Geoff would arrange about Simpson and the studio; he would recover most of his collection; Sanda's cold would get better, and things would drop back to what they had been. So he decided and, a little cheered, went out to dine.

Almost the first man he noticed in the famous restaurant at which he dined was Geoff with a brother officer. They were entertaining two ladies. A pillar screened him from the party so that he was free to study them without being seen. It was clear to him from the beginning that Geoff was infatuted with his companion—a woman of a singular type of beauty—dark, dusky, broad-browed, with a curiously pointed chin and long, heavy-lidded, slightly oblique eyes, very dark and glowing. Her hair was black, and she was dressed in a black gown with an odd metallic sheen. It seemed to John Trask that she spoke softly, when she spoke at all, and she rarely smiled—a dark woman, singular, almost bizarre, with a veiled soul, mysterious. Yet there was a darkling fierceness and a suggestion of sheathed strength about her.

"She looks like a woman who has precipitated and survived some frightful tragedy in the seraglio of an Eastern king," thought John Trask uneasily. "There is knowledge in her eyes—yes, and a strange wisdom. She has either come down from a lofty place or has climbed up from some stupendous and terrible deeps. She will bring no happiness to Geoff—but she owns him, and he is satisfied to be owned."

The party did not dine long or elaborately. Though they did not hurry, they gave an impression that they were anxious to be gone.

John Trask did not go over to them.

Many eyes followed the party as they left. They seemed to be well known in that restaurant.

Trask learned from his waiter that the dark lady with Geoff was Trecis—yes; Trecis herself. The waiter appeared to take it quite as understoood that *monsieur* knew who Trecis was. The lieutenant did not undeceive him. Another question or so gleaned an impression that she was to do with a so-called Egyptian ballet at one of the larger music-halls.

John Trask leaned back with a vague sensation of relief. No doubt Trecis—one did not use any ordinary prefix in speaking of her, it appeared—was going on to her ballet. Obviously.

Later, he saw her in the ballet—a wonderful, grotesque, barbarously passionate business which, in itself, failed to move him, though he saw that the bulk of the spectators hung upon it breathless.

AT THE end of a fortnight he decided to go home. He had not succeeded in buying back any of the pictures or the old manuscripts. He would begin the collection all over again. Geoff had just been demobilized and was at home for the shooting. He had decided to shoot, too, and to ride—not that he felt any great keenness for these sports, but because he felt it would please his father. After the experiences of the last four years, John Trask found it easier to sink more of his inclinations, to set aside his own desires, than he had once found it. Suffering had taught him that, at least.

Then on the day before he was to leave came the letter from Sanda—the first he had received from her for over two years. It was quite short, and in every respect precisely the letter he did not expect.

DEAR JACK:

We shall be leaving here soon, but I don't think I can leave without seeing you—as I had intended. Please come on Friday afternoon. If you can put out of your mind everything as it was with us before the war, you will be glad to have done so.

SANDA.

That was all; but it caught his heart in a grip that seemed to stop its pulsing. For now, and by this, he knew that all was not well. He had known in his deep heart all the time—from that moment under the shrine when he had noticed the odd droop of the vicar's smile and the appeal in his voice.

It seemed to him, as he sat in the flying express, that he had been living in dreams, without one clear thought, all the time he had been home. There had been an unreality; he had drifted, floated, without caring even to clutch at something firm or stable. As if he had been waiting—waiting! That was why the studio matter had not hurt him more; that was why he had found it easy to check his anger and to be what Violet had called "philosophical" about it. There was worse to come—his instinct had told him so. That was why he could take no real interest in recovering his lost collection. And it accounted for the oppression which had weighed upon him——

Sanda's letter divided the dull fog upon his mind like a sudden steel flashing through mist. He sat in his corner staring into vacancy.

But it was with a new clearness of mind that he stepped out into the September afternoon at his home station, nor did it abate during his quick walk to Sanda's house.

He was expected. The maid stood aside for his entry without a word.

"Miss Sanda?" he said.

"Miss Sanda is in the drawing-room, sir," replied the maid, and he went there.

She was standing by a little table near the hearth, looking toward the door. He saw that she was dressed in black or in some loose material so dark that it was not less somber than black. She was paler than she had once been, paler and older, but as beautiful as ever—tall, graceful, swaying. He stumbled toward her.

"Sanda—" he said, reaching to her with

both hands, and vaguely aware that her eyes were full of tears.

She caught his hands in hers—not in any gesture of welcome but as though to steady him, almost to hold him off.

"No, no!" she cried in a low voice. "Not like this—not like this!" For he would have taken her into his arms. "Look! Do you see this, Jack?"

She offered a closed white hand for his regard, and he came upon the gold band of a wedding-ring.

"I am Geoff's wife," she said, her mouth wry with pain.

Their hands fell apart. The brightness died out of his eyes.

"Geoff's wife?" he repeated dully.

"Yes. It is why I wrote to you—so that I could explain. Will you sit down, Jack, please? I won't take long."

HE SAT down, watching her as she took a low chair close to him. He was no longer suffering. All that singular, bright lucidity which had been his when he came to the house had vanished. This, even this, he knew, was not the whole of the suffering to which he had returned.

Sanda, the wonderful, the glorious, the star of all his dreams, the mental elixir which alone had kept the life in him during the prison-days, his hope, his very religion, was not for him after all!

And he was oddly unmoved. Before he had seen that ring or heard her explanation of it, he was almost unmanned in the joy of this meeting—now he was "philosophical." It was all in a line with earlier events— his studio ruined, his collection dispersed, and now Sanda was lost. Was there anything else to lose? A low, quiet voice in his heart seemed to respond that there was yet a valley of pain to traverse.

He was aware of Sanda's voice, speaking earnestly, full of sorrow.

"Geoff seemed to change from a boy to a man—a most wonderful man—almost at once," she was saying. "At the beginning, he was just a big boy, delighting in a noisy, powerful motor-bicycle or a young horse. He went away for a little while, and when he returned he was transformed into a knight—an air-man. He came soaring high over the park in a swift, graceful, hawklike thing, and he showed us his mastery of it before he came down—looping, diving, spinning—most wonderful! And he had done such things—even so soon. He had destroyed a Zeppelin and was already decorated. They say he has a genius for flying, and I think that is true, and he had acquired a habit of mastery. I suppose that is what the daily contact with death teaches them—oh, I don't know why—why—why! I have thought so long and often about these things that my mind is only a medley. But I know that from the instant he alighted in the park, he intended to take me—it was in his eyes—and—God forgive me!—I was glad. That was after Kut. I don't ask you to forgive me; I couldn't expect that. I think I was bewitched. I went to London to visit some friends, but Geoff was posted to some anti-aircraft station down the Thames. He did not expect it—nor did I. It just happened in that way. He could come to town fairly often at times—and he did. I saw that I could not escape him—and I did not wish to. We went about together a good deal. It was all wild and unreal. There was a side of London life which was like a strange fever during the second half of the war—an 'eat, drink and be merry *in case* we die' spirit for the fighting men, and 'eat, drink and be merry in case *they* die' for us—the women. Then came the news that you were not among the British officers in Turkey, and you were reported dead. Geoff and I were married then at a registry office—we were mad, but not too mad to be ashamed to marry openly—so soon after—you— And we were very happy.

"So for two years we were married, and nobody knew. Geoff was winning new distinctions daily. He went to France and Belgium, then home for naval work, then back to Belgium and again to a coast station at home. It was just before the armistice that he met Trecis, and she—widowed me. Geoff forgot everything but that Egyptian sorceress. She has him in chains of steel. I have deserved it all. I did not respect your memory—and Geoff has been enchanted from me. Trecis will ruin him, and some day he will come back to me—burnt out. He nearly did once—a few months ago. They quarreled, and he came to me again—but I could not keep him very long. But that is *my* sorrow—and you have too many sorrows of your own to deserve mine. That is all. I ought to have told you this when you came home, but I had not the courage. Forgive me, Jack; I have suffered—and I shall suffer a great deal more before it is finished. Don't blame Geoff. After all, he's only a boy—a boy made hard and careless by his familiarity with danger and death. He is not even bad; but he has been driven to form a habit of taking what he wants without heeding anything else. I suppose that is what one does when one never knows whether one's next hour may be the last hour. It is due to the war—the war!"

It sounded like a wail.

The lieutenant took her hands, and they were cold.

"Don't grieve because of me, Sanda dear," he said. "I understand. I have not had a very good time, but it has taught me how to endure things—to be what Violet calls 'philosophical'——"

He broke off as a sudden thudding of hoofs pounded along the gravel drive outside up to the door. The electric bell screamed, and the voice of a man shouted to his horse to stand still.

Even before the white-faced maid came into the room, John Trask knew that all this only signaled the opening of yet another Valley of Suffering for him.

Sanda hurried past the maid to the man in the hall and the lieutenant followed her.

"What is it? Oh, what is it?" she cried.

The man, one of the grooms from Sir John's, looked at them, panting a little.

"It's the major—a shooting-accident down by the lower plantation—Sir John's gun. The major sent for Miss Evesmoor," he said.

THEY waited for no more. Together, Geoffrey Trask's wife and his brother hurried out.

"The short cut, Sanda," said the lieutenant, and they passed quickly through the little gate and so into the old wood. High overhead, a little irresolute wind was wandering like an aimless sprite through the boughs, plucking yellow leaves and dropping them softly—they fell like dead or dying butterflies. Once Sanda cried out, shaking her hand.

"What is it, Sanda?

"Something touched me—alighted on me. I thought it was alive—a big moth——"

"It was only a dead leaf falling, Sanda dear—the woods are full of them. There are no moths left now. Hold my arm, Sanda?

They hurried on down the winding path that was barely distinguishable in the gloom.

"I know that there has been a terrible accident!" she cried. "A great tragedy!" She was distraught. "The night fell like a night of tragedy. This gray, gray October— Oh, but I could not endure it if Geoff goes before we reach him!"

She was running, with little steps, and he checked her.

"You will tire yourself too soon, Sanda—it is a long way to run across the park—and you have nothing to fear. I know, dear. I can see things." He was running by her side, whispering as he ran. "That is, things are being made plain to me. You will not lose Geoff to-night, my dear. I *know!*"

She glanced at him, twisting her head sideways, and she saw that, though his face was white, his eyes were bright.

"This is *my* twilight—this is the beginning of *my* night. It was for this that the commander of that American battle-ship was destined to give alms to the prisoners," he said strangely.

She thought him fey and pressed on without answering.

They came out into the park, deep gray with the coming of night. Back in the woods the hard unmusical note of a roosting pheasant startled from sleep rang like a stone rattled in a deep china vase, and Sanda started.

"It is only a pheasant crowing, Sanda dear," he reassured her.

"No. It was some one crying out in pain."

"I heard it, Sanda. It was only a bird startled in the night—only a pheasant."

"It was crying out— Perhaps Geoff shot it—wounded it to-day." She was lacerating herself in her anguish and terror, and he said no more.

The lights of the great house swung into view, and they climbed the long, gradual slope.

An old, pale, trembling man whose mouth quivered uncontrollably — the lieutenant hardly recognized his father at first—ran out from the lighted hall with outstretched hands, one to each of them.

"He was crying out for you both," he quavered. "Never a word for me. My gun it was—I don't know how— Never a word——"

Half blindly he brought them to the white, still form that had once been an ace. He was unconscious now, and the doctor's face was grave. The vicar was there—he had met the shooting party—but his coat was off and he was busy with dreadful white-and-red cloths. There were others—women of the house—but Violet had not yet returned from a visit.

The doctor spoke quietly to Sir John—but his eyes were fixed on Sanda in a strange and appraising stare. From the low, incisive phrases there leaped with the clean, swift suddenness of a search-light a terrible demand—stark, inexorable, ruthless—conveyed to them without the waste of one syllable of speech, one second of time.

"Transfusion. Without blood he will die."

The look of the medical man was almost a challenge—and it was upon Sanda that he gazed.

"You?" he asked, his voice suddenly gentle.

"Ah—gladly!" She stepped forward, her eyes shining.

But as he regarded her, abruptly the doctor's face shadowed.

"No," he said. "It is impossible."

"It is my right. I claim it, and I will yield it to no one. Why—I am his *wife*, you know!" Her voice rang with a note of triumph.

"And after a little while to be the mother of his son," said the doctor, a great compassion on his face. "It is quite impossible."

She cried out lowly, like a trapped thing fainting in pain, for it was true, and John Trask passed before her.

"It is for me," he said, with a strange smile. "Take all that he needs."

For one instant the doctor hesitated.

"Very well," he said. "We must be quick."

Over his shoulder Jack Trask saw the face of the vicar. His mouth was drooping like a man trying to smile so that he should not weep—even as he had looked when at the shrine——

But the lieutenant was thrilling with a new and singular joy. The doctor had said that there was no serious danger to him in the giving of blood, but for all that, as surely as he knew that Geoff needed that which ran in his veins, so he knew that this was to be the end of things for him. But now that brought him only a sharp and invigorating delight. Everything that he had really valued had been taken—not deliberately, not infamously, but in the natural process of rebuilding upon the dry bones of his memory.

His studio, his collection, Sanda—gone, all gone! But they did not matter now. An odd, twisted thought went weaving through his mind. How singular that one of two brothers should have all the ill fortune, if it was ill fortune at all, to give his life for his brother, and the other to have all the good fortune, for he knew clairvoyantly that this wound was the best thing that could have befallen Geoff. It would release him from the enchantment of Trecis and save him from the hopeless end of that liaison—it would bind him to Sanda forever.

For himself, it was good to give—to offer that which was acceptable. All the other things had been taken from him; but this, life itself, he gave—gave freely, generously, grateful to be able to give.

How much better than to die—to rot—in that Turkish den of infamy and foulness and despair.

The doctor was ready for him, and a strange, wistful desire dickered in his mind as he turned. He leaned to the vicar, whispering that, if it were quite in order, he would like to feel that if anything happened his name might perhaps be permitted to remain on the shrine—if nobody raised any objection.

The vicar tried to say that it would not be necessary — could not speak — and nodded, smiling his pitiful drooping smile.

"Now, my boy—" said the doctor.

THERE is a little pilgrimage which the children of Geoffrey Trask and Sanda, his wife, will often make, and upon which their friends and little visitors, when they are for a space tired of their play, will accompany them. It will not take them far from the beautiful and exquisitely kept little pavilion in the great park that is called "the studio"—only down the hill and through the village to the shrine, there to look upon and perhaps to wonder about that uncle whose name is still inscribed upon the roll:

LIEUTENANT JOHN RODNEY TRASK, R. A. S. C.

Short Vamps

Cissy Was Demure, but Wise, and She Gets the Breaks—and Her Way. How She Did It Forms another Delightful Contribution from the Author of "That Lovely Bounder," "Dicky's Continuity," etc.

By Walter De Leon

LOOKING over some vaudeville programs in one of Billy Renton's old scrap-books, I saw the name of a team which brought to mind a tall, strapping, awkward young chap and a sunny sprite of a girl with dancing eyes and an irresistibly droll trick of speech.

"Whatever became of Jimmy Regan and Cissy Welsh?" I asked Billy. "She was headed for big things."

"She was. She had everything it takes to make a star except wanting to be one. That was because she got so absorbed in steering the prodigal son of the Regan Shoe Company back to the fatted calf and the vici kids that she forgot all about her own future. At that, if she hadn't got a couple of lucky breaks, like being overcome with the heat in Grand Rapids and overtook with the pneumonia in Canton, Ohio—" Billy shook his head dubiously.

"What's lucky about pneumonia?" I asked.

"I'll tell you about it."

It was down in Texas, where the cow-sheep- and sucker- herders tend their flocks 'neath the shade of trick oil-derricks, that Cissy first met Jimmy Regan. Why Jimmy was there, nobody ever knew. Somewhere between his father's two big factories and the main office in Boston the boy was supposed to settle down and follow the path his daddy's shoes had made. Had come one of those bitter father-and-son quarrels; result, Jimmy walking the boulevards of Waco one night waiting till the ninety-five cents in his pocket was gone before striking some one for a job. He was too proud to S O S his father. Besides, he knew it wouldn't do him any good.

Cissy was sojourning in Waco for a definite reason—it being four shows a day except on Saturday, when she frolicked as often as the house-manager could empty his theatre and fill it again.

But Cissy was used to that. She'd been born in the star dressing-room of a continuous house. Old Paddy Welsh, the Irish yodler, of Welsh and Maddigan, was her daddy—Maddigan being Kathleen, Paddy's wife, who occupied her spare moments between performances dragging up three kids and blarneying the managers into handing her the salary-envelope instead of Paddy, so as to give the restaurant-keepers an even break with the bartenders.

When Cissy was seven, her parents, greatly assisted by a sleepy engineer and an open switch, quit trouping. Pete McCormack and his wife took the orphan and put her into their comedy bike-act, bringing her on in a pink-silk dress at the finish of their turn to pull a little "give us your kind applause," which otherwise they wouldn't have got. At nine, Cissy was singing a song or two. At eleven, she had a dance to go with the songs. At thirteen— She never was thirteen. The Society for the Prevention of Actors' Children Associating with Their Parents got inquisitive, and Cissy skipped a couple of years one night between Olean and Scranton.

When she was sixteen—total elapsed time—Pete and his wife retired from vaudeville for the reason that the booking-office refused to book their act any more. Pete didn't give Cissy any money—he never had—but he dug up an engagement for her with a honky-tonk "girl act," and for two years Cissy underwent intensive training as a pathfinder and map-maker. She played burgs that aren't any more, and others that never will be.

It wasn't because she was stage-struck that kept her leaping in and out of those tanks. But vaudeville was the only thing she knew that was worth any money to her. And it wasn't because she hadn't tried to break away that kept her tied to this particular job. She hated it. The trick was billed "Six Peaches and a Pippin," but Cissy always spoke of it as "Sick Peaches and a Prune," the breakfast-fruit term referring to the comedian who was stewed most of the time and all of the time pestiferous to Cissy. He liked her and wanted her, although he never got drunk enough to offer to marry her.

THIS night in Waco, walking down the dark alley that architects always build for the actors to stumble through from the stage-entrance to the street, the Prune was easing into Cissy's understanding that he had her as far from civilization and the booking-office as he'd ever get her, and that consequently she had a long, lonesome walk ahead of her if she didn't listen to reason. He was the owner of the act and, as such, had certain powers and perquisites.

Young Regan, reviewing once more the details of the fight he'd had with his father, almost fell over the girl and the Prune as they turned out of the alley. Jimmy, mad clean through, heard Cissy say,

"You're talking on a dead wire, Prune."

"Prune!" The boiled one hadn't heard that before. "You ain't talking to *me*, are you?" He grabbed her arm and twisted it.

"Let go," Cissy said quietly, biting her red lip with the pain. "I—I was only kidding."

"I'll teach you how to call names, you little—" What he started calling her was never finished. A large, firm hand covered with athletic fingers closed the Prune's mouth with a jolt that carried with it many bright lights.

Jimmy retrieved his fist and hurried Cissy down to the corner.

"Sorry, miss," he explained, feeling that inward warmth that always goes with the strong-arm rescue-stuff; "but I couldn't stand by and let him use language like that."

"Well, you sure spilled the beans for me," Cissy replied, without a trace of gratitude in her voice.

"Oh, I don't think he'll bother you again," Jimmy answered, wondering where the inward warmth had gone.

"He sure won't," Cissy agreed. "Not even to ask me will I take the three days' salary that's coming to me will he bother me. If your idea was to separate me from the troupe, you win, mister. Maybe you can tell me now how I'm going to eat for the rest of the year."

"Holy smoke, you—you're angry!" Jimmy stuttered.

"Why wouldn't I be?" Cissy demanded, looking up from her five-foot minus at Jimmy's six-foot plus. "Is there anybody in this metropolis that'll give me a contract for the rest of the season at thirty-five a week?"

"But that big loafer called you—" Jimmy began, but Cissy cut in with:

"That big loafer is my boss. No; I'm wrong—he *was* my boss."

And then she suddenly realized that the struggle, which had kept her nerves on edge and herself on her knees night and morning for nearly a year, was won. She leaned weakly against a telephone-pole and closed her eyes.

"Let me get you a cup of coffee—or something," urged Jimmy.

"That's the only sensible thing you've said yet," Cissy told him, leaning on his arm and guiding him into the one-arm lunch next to her hotel.

After his first good look at her, Jimmy understood why he had come to Waco. Cissy's black hair, big blue eyes, impudently short nose and wide, perfectly shaped mouth were a pleasing advertisement of the harp-strain in her blood. There wasn't a diving-act in the business that showed anything as nifty as her dimunitive but exceedingly feminine figure. As for her brains, even though she'd never gone to college, she'd read a lot of other things than her press notices. Jimmy fell for her in a large, soggy lump.

"I wish there was something I could do to square myself," he wished for the twentieth time. "I'm not financially fixed to——"

"You weren't thinking of offering me

money, were you?" Cissy interrupted smoothly. Jimmy laughed.

"I haven't any to offer. Also, I have no job."

"With me, here, it's unanimous," the girl added. "Listen; I've got a two-act, a boy-and-girl talking, singing and dancing skit, that I've been saving in case the worst should ever happen. Suppose we rehearse it and inflict it on the natives."

"Go on the stage—with you?" Jimmy was all flustered. "You think I'd make a good actor?"

"I'm not asking you to act. I'll do most of that. But I've got to have a foil. It's your size I'm after. I need a big, heavy-looking boo—er, a big fellow to feed my comedy to me. Will you try it?"

The smile she sent along ahead of the words deadened the pain of her remarks. Jimmy promised to meet her the next morning.

COMMENCED Cissy's troubles. During a lull in their third rehearsal, Jimmy announced,

"I'm doing pretty well, don't you think?"

"For you, you're doing wonderful," Cissy answered. "Some day you're going to coax your singing voice past your tonsils, and then maybe I'll find out what's the matter with it."

"I meant my dancing," Jimmy said stiffly.

"If I could only discover which one of your feet is the Presbyterian, I could concentrate on it," Cissy explained. "And while I think of it, most dancers bend their knees every once in a while. It sort of adds grace, and is inclined to please the audience."

Jimmy picked up his hat and started toward the door.

"Come here, you!" Cissy shouted. "Don't you dare get sensitive with me. We're going to show them something they haven't seen before, and generally that means money in vaudeville."

They got a lucky break at the try-out Cissy arranged. Hoblentz, the president of the Three-State Circuit, happened to be out in front, and Cissy's prayer just before she went on—"O Lord, all I ask is, don't let this big bozo fall into the footlights"—was answered. After making the customers laugh for ten minutes, they finished with a dance that brought them four healthy bows, mainly because nobody in the audience remembered to look at Jimmy.

Hoblentz gave them his circuit and sent a great report into the booking-office. A week later, contracts began arriving.

"Guess I'd better handle the business-end of the act," remarked Cissy, signing the team-name to a three-day sentence in Joplin, Missouri. There being nothing much for Jimmy to say, he didn't say it.

Cissy didn't know anything about the shoes hanging on the Regan family tree till one blistering hot night in Grand Rapids—the time the heat got to her.

With some consecutive time booked up, the act set and Jimmy trained to stay out of the spotlight, Cissy had settled herself to find out if there was anything to her big partner except his weaknesses. In her eighteen years of small time she'd never met any one like him, and she didn't understand a lot of things he said and did. He was to her a new kind of bug, but a clean, nice one—nothing to be afraid of, like the Prune. She liked his class, his good-heartedness, the feeling of protection she had when he was with her—everything, in fact, except his acting. "He's terrible," she grinned to herself; "but he's great for me." Then she added, "He sure is nice to me, too."

But Cissy had seen too many boy-and-girl acts split on account of unconfined and rampant sentiment to overlook the possibility of it happening again. Besides, Cissy always played it safe whenever she could. So she formed the habit of letting Jimmy take her to her hotel every night after work. There she'd give him a "that's all there is; there isn't any more" smile and an exit-cue.

Jimmy, being new to the business, naturally got the idea that his partner was bowing out on him every night because she didn't crave his society. His stiff-necked pride made him swallow a lot of impetuous words that she inspired in him, even though it didn't prevent him from using his left hook severely one night on a couple of wisecrackers who were audibly speculating whether Cissy was morally particular or not.

And because, at the end of three months, Jimmy was nothing—only strangely polite to her, Cissy came to the conclusion that he wasn't giving her a thought outside of business. That being the state of affairs she'd been working for, she should have been satisfied. Yeah; she *should!*

Coming off after a matinée in Grand Rapids, Cissy dropped in a heap in the wings. Jimmie picked her up and rushed her into her dressing-room. The house physician's verdict was: "Too much heavy dancing for this weather; that's all. Keep her quiet the rest of the afternoon, and, after the sun goes down, take her out on the lake and keep her there as long as she'll stay. She'll be as good as ever with a couple of days' rest."

So it was that about ten o'clock that night, in a rowboat on the lake, the moon being full and not caring who saw it, Cissy was trailing her hand in the water and dreaming about things that other girls of her age dream on moonlit nights.

Breaking a long silence, Jimmy said:

"What's the matter with me? I've known a lot of girls—nice girls—that didn't act like I was poison. When I was in college——"

College! That explained a lot of things.

"Where did you go to college?"

Jimmy told her. Cissy wanted to know more about him. So the boy told her all about his family, and his lovely sister who had married an Italian count and had twin girl babies, and his father, and his father's big shoe factories, and his fight with his father, and the beautiful old-fashioned home just outside of Boston where he'd been born and where his mother had passed on just as they were becoming real pals—the home that his father had promised him as a wedding-gift when Jimmy found the right girl.

Cissy couldn't hear enough about that old-fashioned home outside of Boston. Jimmy had to describe every room, the closet under the stairs where he kept his skates and hockey-sticks, the large, beam-ceilinged dining-room and huge open fireplace with its Dutch oven, the pewter plate on the old mahogany sideboard that grandfather Regan's grandaddy had been given when he was governor of the colony.

And little Cissy, who had never known anything in her life but dirty theatres, cheap hotels and hard work, with Poverty always leering at her round the corner, sat there with her hand trailing in the water and wondered if there was much difference between heaven and living in a home full of old silver, Colonial furniture and love.

She began thinking about Jimmy, the bad actor. On account of his size and the contrast he made alongside of her, he was getting by with all she required of him in the skit they were playing. But she knew she couldn't play it forever—two or three years at the most. Then what would become of Jimmy? Everybody except him knew he wouldn't last a week with any other act in the business. He was too good a boy—Cissy liked him too much—to let him throw away all that time and innocently walk into the heart-breaking jolt waiting at the end of it. Jimmy was class. The longer Cissy thought of him unconsciously dubbing toward a future that was behind him, the stronger she felt it was up to her to do something about it.

"Does your father know you're in vaudeville?" she asked.

"He doesn't care where I am or what I'm doing," Jimmy answered. "The last thing he told me was that if he never saw or heard from me again, that was soon enough for him."

"He only said that because you had him peeved," Cissy continued. "You're his only son, aren't you, Jimmy?"

Young Regan nodded. Cissy, playing it safe, changed the subject, but when they reached the hotel that night, she insisted on dictating a letter for Jimmy to send his father.

> DEAR DAD:
>
> Know you will be surprised to learn that I have gone on the stage. I am in vaudeville, playing an act with a young woman named Miss Cecelia Welsh.
>
> We have been very successful so far, and prospects are good.
>
> I am enclosing a list of the towns we will be playing, the names of the theatres and the dates we will be there.
>
> Hoping you are in your usual good health, your son, JIMMY.

A WEEK later Jimmy showed Cissy his father's reply.

> MR. JAS. R. REGAN, Majestic Theatre, Galesburg, Ill.
>
> SIR: Your favor to hand. The best I am able to offer you is a job as assistant timekeeper at the Brockton factory. Wages, twenty-five dollars per week.
>
> Awaiting your acceptance, I am, etc.,
> CHAS. R. REGAN.

Cissy read it twice. Then she steamed up like a flivver on a hot day.

"You're not going to let him get away

with *this*, are you?" she demanded. She hastily scribbled a few lines on the back of the envelope. "Send him this—in a wire—paid."

Jimmy read:

> Much obliged. Would not desert my partner, even if I weren't making seventy-five dollars every week, which I am. JIMMY.

"Now," she calmly told him when he returned from the telegraph office, "you're going to sit down and write him a letter. And every two weeks you're going to write, telling him how much money you've saved since the last time you wrote."

"Don't make me laugh," Jimmy grinned. "I haven't saved any money."

"Well, here's where you start. How much have you in your pocket? Give me half of it."

"What's the idea?" Jimmy drawled, handing her his money.

Cissy hesitated.

"Haven't you ever noticed the difference between the way a manager treats an act that needs work and the way he treats one that's so busy it doesn't care whether it plays his theatre or not?" she said, leaving it to Jimmy to guess what she really meant.

THE collection of wild penumonia-germs which accompanied Cissy to the hospital in Canton, Ohio, put a crimp in her original plans. It added what they call the personal element to her campaign for restoring to Jimmy the birthrights he'd messed up. All through her delirium she raved about Jimmy—shoes—Jimmy—big home in Boston—Jimmy—heaven—and Jimmy. So, as soon as possible they admitted the haggard young man who had been spending his waking-hours wearing out the pavement in front of the hospital. Regan staggered in behind a bower of American beauties.

"Why the flowers? I'm still alive," chirped Cissy, hoping the big boy wouldn't guess how glad she was to see him. Then she noticed the look in his eyes. "Why, Jimmy dear——"

That "dear" did the trick. Jimmy started talking. The nurse wandered out into the hall. With his voice all choked up and spasmodic, but sounding to Cissy like music dripping with honey, Jimmy told her all the things she meant to him—all the hopes and prayers he'd been carrying round in his heart that she'd never let him talk about. And because she was eighteen and human, and had just escaped taking the Long Lay-off, she didn't have the strength to do anything except listen to him and be perfectly happy.

Jimmy gave her no time to think of anything but the two of them until the Saturday night in Trenton, New Jersey, when they signed the well-known, long-term play-or-pay contract that entitled them to look any hotel clerk straight in the eye and register "Mr. and Mrs. Jas. R. Regan." On their way to the railroad station they dropped a wire to old man Regan and then went on a delicious honeymoon—an entire Sunday in Philadelphia.

Monday morning, going to Camden for three days' labor, they wondered what Regan, senior would rid his system of in replying to the announcement they'd sent. In spite of the fact that he had never but once answered any of the boy's letters, they both felt positive he'd have something to say about the wedding.

It was Wednesday before Jimmy found the letter in the mail-box.

> It would be unnatural in me not to be interested in the marriage of a Regan, and senseless of me to deny it.
>
> I believe you enough of a gentleman not to have permitted Miss Welsh to wed you under the impression that you were to share in the Regan estate. Nor can I conceive of any man with Regan blood in him—to put it bluntly—marrying his job.
>
> To impute any other than these reasons for the marriage is to insult Mrs. Regan.
>
> I except, of course, the age-old reason springing from mutual affection and respect. A union formed upon such a foundation no man has the right to criticize. Yours, etc., CHAS. R. REGAN.

"Welcome into the Regan family!" Cissy spoke, lightly sarcastic, hoping to start something before Jimmy got the meaning of the line in the letter which had set her own blood boiling.

"Marry my job, eh?" muttered Jimmy. And little Cissy knew she'd failed in her wish. Also, she knew that nothing she could say would help him. Jimmy had a fight on his hands that he had to fight alone.

For the first time Cissy realized that, however innocent he had been—and she didn't doubt him for a second—the verdict of the profession would be that Jimmy had married his meal-ticket. It would be only a matter of time before everybody would be contemptuously referring to him as "Cissy's excess baggage." She thought she understood Jimmy well enough to know he'd never stand for that. But, on the other hand, because Jimmy had never done any real work, because quitting the stage would mean giving up all they'd been fighting for, he might persuade himself that as long as *she* didn't complain, it was nobody's business but their own. As the weeks went on, Cissy, who always played it safe whenever she could, finally figured out a way to preserve the mutual affection and respect that old man Regan had mentioned, no matter what Jimmy decided.

It took her husband much longer to get his mind straight and set. The stickler in his problem was this: Even if Cissy should be willing to give up the success and fame she was coming closer to every week, on the chance that he could provide a decent home for her, was it fair to ask her to do it? Jimmy was so proud of his wife he was humble, which was why it took him months to make up his mind as to what he ought to do. Neither of them figured for a minute on separating and going different ways. But when Jimmy found his answer, he didn't lose any time telling it to Cissy.

"I'm going to quit the business, sweetheart."

"I've been expecting that," Cissy replied, meaning she'd been praying for it. "Will you keep on working with me for a few months longer, though? By being careful, we ought to save a lot of money by the first of February."

"You're the boss, kiddie. But why the first of February?"

"We'll have to cancel all our time then, anyway."

"Why?"

Cissy pulled his head down and whispered something in her husband's ear that made him gasp, turn green, then red, and then hug her till she begged for mercy.

"And that's one little thing you're *not* going to write to your dad," Cissy murmured just before she dropped off to sleep.

THEY found an apartment on the West Side of New York, with plenty of sunshine for Cissy to run the electric sewing-machine by. Jimmy started scouting a job. The only thing he knew—outside of show business—was shoes. After a week of tramping round town looking for an opening, happened the luckiest of all the breaks that had fallen Cissy's way.

Jimmy connected with a job in a Regan shoe store that had been caught with three big cases of short-vamp satin slippers in a season nobody would wear anything but a long English toe. Falling over one of the cases in the basement, young Regan asked what they were. Miller, the manager, told him, adding,

"This year you can't *give* away a short-vamp slipper."

Jimmy knew better. A long, pointed slipper, besides looking like a joke on a dancer's foot, is the hardest thing in the world to dance in, and still harder to keep looking decent, on account of the toe wrinkling up under pressure. Since the English last had become stylish, most of the dancers were having a modified slipper made to order at fifteen to twenty-five dollars per order. Which was just plain cruelty, because everybody, including the shoemakers, knows that the life of a stage dancing-slipper is so short it's pitiful.

"If I can get rid of that dead stock for you, what's in it for me?" Jimmy asked.

"I'll tell you what they cost us, and you can use your own judgment," Miller replied. "But how are you going to sell them without using chloroform?"

"Make a window display and give me the rest of the day off. I know somebody on nearly every bill in town. When those nearly Bessie Claytons find they can get all sizes and colors in short-vamp satin slippers for less than half the price they've been paying, the line will form out on the sidewalk right after breakfast each morning."

A week later, Miller wired to old man Regan at the Boston office:

> Have you any more short-vamp satins? Can use two cases.

The answer came the same day:

> Cases shipped. Who is the miracle-man?

And Miller sent:

> Miracle-man making profit for himself of dollar per pair. His name is James R. Regan.

But on a certain blithe spring morning James R. Regan forgot all about the shoe business. He didn't even 'phone the store. He spent most of the morning in his dining-room, vainly trying to find a cigarette that tasted right.

At ten o'clock the nurse came in with a nine-pound boy yelling for air. Jimmy took one look at his son.

"How—how's Cissy?"

"Perfectly wonderful! You can go in and see her for a moment."

"Hello, Jimmy sweetheart!" Cissy smiled up at him. "Didn't I do noble? Don't forget to wire your father right away, will you?"

The next night, when he opened the door of his apartment, Jimmy heard a man's voice in the room with Cissy. His heart pounding heavily, Jimmy peeked through the crack of the door.

"Dad!"

"Sh! He's just dropped off to sleep." The Regan Shoe Company pointed to a bundle of baby-blankets he was jiggling in his arms.

"Jimmy dear, your father and I have been talking all afternoon about our moving up to Boston."

"Boston! But——"

Jimmy's father interrupted.

"You know you're going to lose your job at the store, don't you?"

"Lose my job! Why?"

"Because I can't afford to run down to New York every time I feel like playing with my grandson!" old man Regan thundered. His voice husked up a bit. "Jim, that old house up there is pining away for some one like Cissy to pull up the blinds and let the sunshine into it. And can't you see this youngster in another year or two climbing all over the big apple tree back of the barn?"

Cissy was squeezing Jimmy's hand tightly under the quilt.

The old gentleman leveled his finger at the boy.

"Disregarding everything else, there's always a desk and a fat salary waiting in the Boston office for any man who can sell short-vamp shoes in a long-vamp season."

The telephone-bell in the hall rang.

"It's the booking-office," Jimmy reported a moment later. "They want to know how soon you're going to be ready to go to work again."

Cissy daintily flecked the lace on her sleeve.

"Tell them thanks for their interest, but that I'm going to our home, and I intend to stay home indefinitely."

"By Gad, you've worked hard enough to get one!" old man Regan rumbled.

"I was lucky to get the breaks I did," said Cissy, reaching for the baby.

Clouds

By Charles Hanson Towne

THEY gather in the morning and at noon,
  Soft billowy masses high above my head,
  Like argosies with thrilling sails outspread,
Bound for a port beyond the sun and moon.
They never anchor in the blue lagoon
  Of heaven, but move their fragile keels instead,
  Faring to regions where the happy dead
Await their cargoes, bright with bliss of June.

Some clean, white morning I shall thus abide
  Upon the wharves that touch Eternity,
Watching those sails on Time's unending tide,
  Waiting those dream-ships on the blowing sea.
And one I love on the last ship will ride,
  And I shall hail her, coming home to me.

Everybody's Magazine, March, 1922

The Story of a Struggle to Be Decent—
A Story That Contains a Challenge

GODLESS VALLEY

The Author Doesn't Preach, but the Story Does. You Will Be Held by the Faithful Picture of the Fight of a Boy and Girl Against the Cruel Odds Their Forefathers Set Up, and You May Get a Lesson Therefrom

By Honoré Willsie

Author of "Still Jim," "The Enchanted Canyon," etc.

Illustrations by Ernest Fuhr

IT WAS not remarkable that Judith should drink and swear at the age of fifteen, for she was a product of Lost Chief, a valley high in the Rockies, whose beauties lay in nature and not in the ideals of its inhabitants. It was remarkable, perhaps, that Douglas Spencer, her stepbrother, aged seventeen, should have the desire, vague at first, of course, to keep himself decent and to keep her decent.

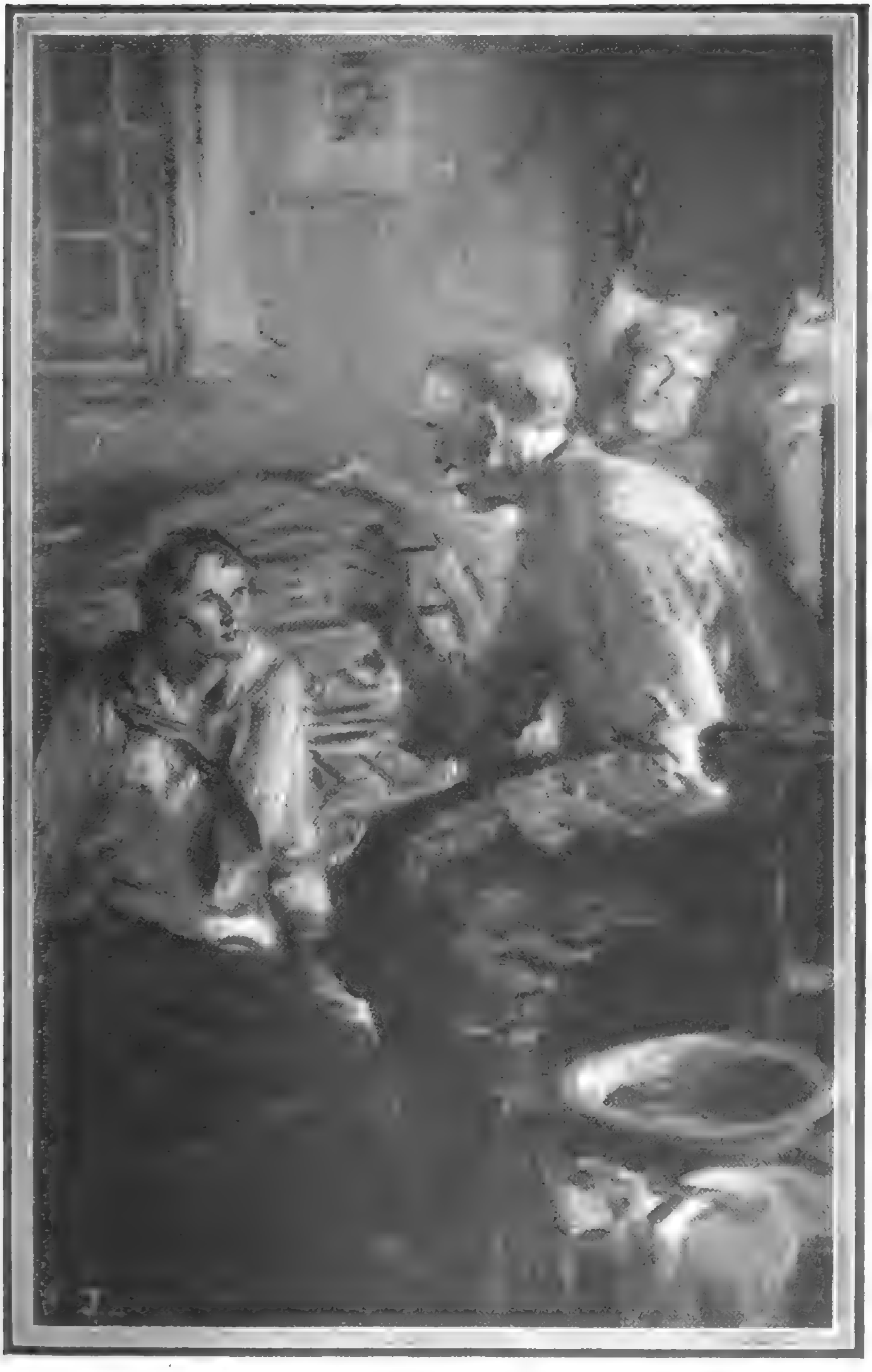
Though Lost Chief had been settled by God-fearing New Englanders, their descendants had developed none of the idealistic traits usually associated with those who live amid the awe-inspiring beauties of nature. They were crass materialists in the main—the "show-me" type—with little faith in the present, none in the hereafter.

There was an exception here and there. There was kindly old Grandma Brown, who was chief ministrant to the sick, who brought the Lost Chief babies into the world and helped bury the dead, and there, too, was Peter Knight, the postmaster, in whom a little of the Puritan strain and a good deal of refinement had somehow managed to survive.

There was none more material, more lacking in faith than John Spencer, who handled his family—consisting of his son Douglas by a first wife, his present wife and her daughter Judith by a former marriage—on caveman principles—harsh severity toward the boy and complete subjection for the women.

Douglas was in love with Judith. Perhaps this fact and the fact that he had found it necessary to warn Judith against his father, who was far too mindful of her beauty, had wakened the suspicion that there was something better in life than the example set before him by Lost Chief. Judith was just budding into a splendid physical womanhood. She could rope a steer more expertly than most of the men. In her drinking and profanity she was not unlike the other Lost Chief women, who were sophisticated almost from the cradle, yet withal intolerant of loose living, a fact which Inez Rodman, the valley's sole exception in this respect, was daily made to realize. Judith's dearest possession was Swift, a half-broken, half-fed little mare which John Spencer had cast off, but out of which the girl wheedled wonderful performances in endurance and catlike quickness, and on whose back she participated in all the wild escapades of the neighborhood. One of these was the driving of a preacher out of the valley.

Doug seemed to have something in him that the other men of the valley did not



Judith gave a little shiver of excitement. "Well, if you know so much about love, Peter, what is it?"

possess, and his stepmother found that she had some one on whom she could lean and look to for help. Peter Knight wanted him to go East to school, but the boy said that ranching was a good enough profession for any one. He was ever keen for adventure, and just after he had been graduated from the log-house school an opportunity presented itself. Elijah Nelson, a Mormon, had settled in a cañon beyond a neighboring peak. Lost Chief heard that nine other Mormon families were to follow and raise cattle and sheep. Charleton Falkner pronounced the edict of the valley: "Mormons and sheep must keep out of this country." And he planned to ride over the range and gather up Nelson's herd, which would be divided among those who would join him. Douglas volunteered with enthusiasm, and so did Scott Parson, one of the turbulent spirits of the valley, who also admired Judith. Scott had recently been acquitted, on grounds of self-defense, of killing Oscar Jefferson, with whom he had had a long-standing quarrel over the ownership of a bull.

WEARY though he was, Douglas was long in getting to sleep that night. Charleton Falkner was deeply admired by all the young men of Lost Chief. Not only was he of the ultrasophisticated type, dear to adolescence, not only was he by far the cleverest hunter in the valley, but, most important of all, his name was whispered in connection with horse and cattle deals, never called questionable by Lost Chief but always mentioned with a wink and a chuckle for their adroitness. To have been asked by Charleton to go as partner on one of his mysterious trips was intoxicating enough to Doug to take the sting out of the fact that Scott met Judith that evening at the post-office and rode home with her.

All the next day Douglas was as cheerful as he had been melancholy. Judith tried to discover several times where he was going and with whom.

"Don't you try tagging me again, like you did on the trip to the half-way house," he said, with a warning grin, when they were finishing the evening chores together.

"No danger! I got a date of my own." This with a toss of her curly head.

"Who with?"

"Don't you wish you knew? Other folks besides you can have interesting deals, Mr. Douglas Spencer!"

"Huh! Some little stunt with Maud, I suppose."

"No, it isn't, either. Say, Doug; did you know Maud is going up to Wyoming City to stay with her aunt and go to school there?"

"I suppose that's what you'd like to do." Doug watched the eager face closely.

"I? Ha! When I leave Lost Chief, it won't be to go to school, Doug. And I wouldn't want to be where I couldn't have horses and mountains, anyhow."

"Well, don't get into mischief, daughter—that's all I have to say about your mysterious deal," said Douglas paternally.

Judith laughed and carried her pail of milk into the kitchen.

It was after ten o'clock that night when Charleton led his two young henchmen along the west trail, past Rodman's and up the cañon toward the first shoulder of Lost Chief Peak. The Moose did not approve of the trip. He showed his disapproval by plunging and side-jumping with nerve-racking persistency. Ginger and Democrat gave him ample turning-room, biting or kicking him if he drew too near them. Midway in the cañon, Charleton left the trail and turned abruptly to the right, up the steep shoulder of the mountain.

"Need a hazer, Doug?" he called.

"Where are you going to camp, Charleton?" laughed Douglas, as the Moose refused to climb.

"On the west shoulder of the peak, just under the elevation monument."

"I'll find you there. I may be delayed for a while."

Charleton laughed, too.

"Just so you get there by dawn."

And Douglas saw the two figures, dim in the starlight, move upward on the barren shoulder. He allowed the Moose to circle for a moment; then he drove the rowels deep. The snorting horse leaped up the steep incline at a pace that shortly left him groaning for breath. But Douglas spurred him relentlessly to the far tree-line. Here he permitted him to breathe while he listened to the receding thud of hoofs above.

When his horse had ceased to groan, Douglas turned him toward the dark shadow of the forest. The Moose reared and turned, falling heavily. Doug was out of the saddle when it crashed against the gravel and in it when the trembling horse rolled to his feet. He brought the knotted reins smartly across the animal's reeking flanks.

The Moose bolted. Doug laughed and swore and, for a time, made no effort to guide his mount. The Moose leaped fallen trunks and low bushes. He jumped black abysses. He thrashed into trees and rocks. But he could not dislodge the figure that clung to his back with knee and spur. Douglas did not know how long this mad flight lasted; but he was beginning to be exhausted himself when the Moose stopped on the edge of a black drop. The horse was shaking and groaning.

"Now, listen here, you Moose," said Douglas; "if you expect to be friends with me, you've got to begin to show some interest in me. I sure do admire your speed and your nerve. You're a better horse than Buster, and I don't want to break you more than I have to. But how about showing interest in me? I'm here to stay, you know; so you might as well begin to put me in your calculations. Now, just to show you're a changed horse, suppose you push up here to the right. I think there's a clear space there where I can see the stars and locate ourselves."

The Moose turned slowly under the rein and carried Doug into an open park. Here he studied the brilliant heavens.

"We'll just move south, old Moose," he announced, "climbing up-hill all the time till we run into something."

The Moose worked steadily enough now, but it seemed a long time to Douglas before he saw the faint glare of a fire through the trees. Charleton and Scott looked up grinning as he rode into the circle of light. Wide bare patches showed on Doug's chaps. One sleeve of his flannel shirt was hanging by a thread. His face was bleeding from many scratches, but he grinned amicably as he slid wearily from the saddle.

"Hello, Doug! Is your horse broke yet?" asked Charleton.

"Some," replied Douglas.

"We thought we heard you a while back," said Scott. "Sounded as if a grizzly had been bitten by a hydrophobia skunk."

"He ain't as nervous as he was," grinned Douglas. "Anything to drink?"

Charleton indicated the coffee-pot and said: "It's only a short time to dawn. Better get what sleep you can!"

Douglas nodded, drank a tin cup of coffee, and then unsaddled the Moose. Scott, rolled in his blanket, watched him with a twisted grin.

"Some horse to take on a trip like this!" he said. "A half-broke mule couldn't be worse. Funny if Doug don't gum the whole game for us, Charleton!"

"You go to blazes, Scott!" grunted Douglas.

Scott sat up with a jerk. Charleton spoke sharply.

"No scrapping! You two get to sleep."

Scott lay down reluctantly. Doug shrugged his broad shoulders and shortly, head on his saddle, feet to the fire, he was fast asleep.

THE trees were black against gray light when Charleton called the two young riders.

"Let's eat and be off," he said briefly.

Breakfast was a short affair of bread, bacon and coffee. While they were bolting it, Charleton outlined the campaign.

"You'll see Nelson's cattle have been all through here. No one else grazes hereabouts. Don't rope any cows with calves following 'em; they make too much bellowing. Get what steers you can by mid-morning into the old corral. There isn't one chance in a thousand we'll meet any one. Nelson's making hay five miles below here. But if any one should come along when you've roped a steer, get him to examine the brand for you, and, of course, if the brand isn't yours, let the critter go."

"Where is the old corral from here?" asked Scott.

"Show him, Doug," ordered Charleton.

The camp had been made just within the tree-line below the peak. Above, against the glowing pink of the heavens, was etched the suave line of the peak, and, topping this, a heap of rocks surmounted by a staff. West of the staff and below it projected the top of a dead spruce on which sat an eagle. To this Douglas pointed.

"Down the mountain, on a line with the staff and the dead spruce, is a thick clump of young aspen—about an acre of it. The old corral is there."

Scott nodded. They broke camp at once and rode away, each one for himself. The

Moose was not yet a cow-pony, but, from Doug's view-point, at least, he was now quite manageable. Any one in Lost Chief could rope a steer from a well-trained horse. Douglas proposed to repay Scott's sneer by bringing in as many animals as either of his companions from the back of this plunging bronco. And although Doug risked his life a hundred times, four of the dozen fat steers that were milling about in the old corral by nine o'clock had been dragged in by the snorting, trembling Moose.

WHEN Douglas closed the bars on his fourth steer, he waited for a short time for Charleton and Scott, but as neither appeared, he set off after another one. He had ridden a good mile from the corral when he heard the bellow of a bull and a shout from Charleton. He spurred the Moose in the direction of the cry. After a short ride he saw Democrat standing with the reins over his head. Under a giant pine close by, Charleton was clinging desperately to the horns of a red bull. Blood was running over the back of his gray shirt. The bull was stamping in a circle in the vain attempt to trample his victim.

"Don't shoot!" gasped Charleton. "Rope his hind legs and throw him! By God, I'll keep him now!"

Twice Doug's lariat darted through the air before the loop caught. But the third attempt was successful, and he raced the half-maddened Moose away and jerked the great bull off his feet. Charleton rolled away to his own lariat lying on the ground near Democrat. He grasped the rope, rose to his knees and twirled it. It twisted about the bull's mighty neck. Charleton sank back to a sitting position and pulled the rope taut.

"Dismount and come up on him, Doug, and try to tie him," he panted.

Douglas obeyed, and shortly the bull was helpless, although he continued to bellow threateningly.

"He'll have Nelson up here, even if he is five miles off," said Douglas anxiously. "Better let him go."

"Take a look at my ankle, Doug," ordered Charleton. "If it's nothing worse than a sprain, I'm in luck."

With many oaths on the part of Charleton the high boot was worked off, disclosing an ankle already puffed and discolored.

"A sprain. Well, I can sit Democrat with that. Now take a look at my shoulder."

Doug turned back the bloody shirt. The bull's horn had grazed the shoulder, but not deeply. Doug tied the wound up with Charleton's neckerchief. He was beginning with his own scarf on the ankle when Scott galloped up.

"Say; you can hear that bull for a thousand miles! What the devil are you up to? I want you both to come and help me get three I've roped down the draw a couple of miles below here."

Douglas explained the accident.

"My Gawd, Charleton, don't you know enough not to tackle a bull on foot?" cried Scott.

"How'd I know there was a bull around?" retorted the wounded man. "I dropped my rope, and when I dismounted to pick it up, he came after me like a Kansas cyclone."

"Well, I'll take the bull to the corral and come back here for grub, if Douglas will fix it up. We'll put plenty of whisky and hot coffee in you, Charleton; then do you think you can get home while Doug and I ride herd?"

"I sure can! Go ahead, Scott. You'd better blind the bull."

Scott nodded, and, picking up several handfuls of dry dust, he threw them into the bull's wide, bloodshot eyes. The animal snorted and tossed his head. Scott continued with handful after handful until the bull's eyes were only muddy blanks under his tossing forelock. His bellowing ceased. Then Scott removed the ropes from his feet and, mounting, led him away. The bull was silent and entirely occupied by the attempt to rub the dust out of his streaming eyes.

"Make it as quick as you can, Scott!" called Charleton. Then, to Douglas: "Get busy with the whisky and coffee, Doug. He ought to be back by the time you've fixed up a snack."

But Scott was long in returning.

"Oughtn't he to be back?" asked Doug, when the bacon was ready.

Charleton looked at his watch.

"He's been gone over an hour. We'll eat; then you go see what kind of trouble he's in, Doug."

Douglas devoured the bacon and bread, then mounted and rode slowly through the silent, scented forest. His blue eyes danced with excitement; his tanned cheeks burned as he guided the Moose through the quivering aspens to the corral. Here he pulled up with a sudden oath. The corral was empty, the fences torn open in half a dozen places.

"That blankety-blank old bull must have started a stampede!" gasped Douglas. "I wouldn't have thought Scott would have left him free in here."

HE RODE through and round the corral. Cattle-tracks led in every direction. He trotted in widening circles. Perhaps a mile north of the corral he pulled up and looked closely at the ground. Single cattle-tracks here converged, and a herd-track led on northward. As he stared at it, the bull came thundering down into view. Doug put the Moose after him, but had not followed him for five minutes when Scott broke into the chase from the right.

"What do you think you're doing, blank you?" he shouted. "What have you done with the rest of the herd?"

"Done with the herd?" roared Douglas. "What are you talking about?"

"I know you, you dogy rider, you! I told you that blankety wild horse of yours would gum the game. There ain't a steer left. What do you mean by riding him into the corral?"

"You're drunk!" retorted Douglas. "You'd better ride after that bull or Charleton will pull a gun on you."

"Ride after nothing! Chase him yourself."

"On second thoughts, I think I will. It's your turn to play nurse. Go on back and tell Charleton what's happened."

"Don't get fresh, young fellow!" snarled Scott.

Douglas pushed back his hat, and his clear blue eyes studied Scott appraisingly. Finally he said,

"I guess, on third thoughts, I'll take you back to Charleton."

Scott laughed.

"Now you're drunk!"

Douglas's six-shooter appeared casually between the Moose's twitching ears.

"Hold up your little brown hand, Scott, till I reach me your gun. Fine! Now ride ahead of me till we find Charleton. Some boy I am on the draw, eh, old-timer?"

Scott swore, but rode ahead at a steady trot until they reached the noonday camp. Charleton looked at them in astonishment.

"Order this damn fool off my back, will you, Charleton?" drawled Scott. "He's mad because I called him for letting that wild cayuse of his stampede the herd."

"He's a liar! This is as good a cow-pony as he ever rode and better!" cried Doug. "Ain't a better horse in Lost Chief than this same Moose. He was after the bull like a hound after a coyote when Scott broke in on us, the dirty——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Charleton. "What's your story, Scott?"

"The corral is broke in forty places, and all the stock gone. I suppose this fool rode his wild horse into the herd and stampeded it. I found him running the bull like he and his horse was both loco."

Douglas uttered an oath.

"Nothing of the kind! When I got there, the herd was gone, and I'd just picked up the trail when the bull come along."

Charleton looked from one young man to the other—Scott, with his dark, handsome face entirely expressionless, sitting easily sidewise in his saddle; Douglas, face flushed, blue eyes angry, standing tense in the stirrups. There came an ugly twist to Charleton's lips, but after a moment he spoke coolly.

"You fellows help me up on Democrat and we'll beat it for home."

"But you don't believe the Moose—" shouted Doug. But Charleton interrupted.

"If I wasn't crippled, I'd mighty soon show you fellows what I believed. As it is, I'm going home. But if I find either of you has double-crossed me, I'll square accounts."

There was that in Charleton's eyes which caused the two riders to dismount without a word. They heaved him into his saddle and, with his lariat, arranged a sling for his injured ankle. When they had made him as comfortable and secure as possible, Scott said politely:

"You don't need two of us, Charleton. I think I'll go after a bear I saw in the raspberry patch beyond the corral."

"Nothing doing, Scott," grunted Charleton.

"You've fallen down on the job, Charleton," Scott laughed; "so you've lost your right to boss."

"No, he ain't," said Douglas. "You come right along."

But this time Doug's six-shooter flashed no more quickly than Scott's. Charleton, his face twisted with pain, waited for a thoughtful minute before he said:

"Put up your guns, boys. Let him go, Doug." And he turned his horse eastward. Douglas reluctantly returned his gun to his hip, and Scott disappeared at a canter. The Moose followed after Democrat.

"What did you do that for, Charleton?" demanded Douglas resentfully. "That's just giving him the herd."

"If he has double-crossed me," returned the older man, "I'm in no shape to handle him just now. He never came back to meet you till he'd turned the herd over to an accomplice. In any case, I lose on this trick."

"But he didn't know you were going to meet up with a bull."

"No; but he was going to keep us away from the corral somehow. You remember he said he'd come back to get us to help him bring in some steers. Of course, you and he might be in cahoots on this; but Scott's tricky, so I'm giving you some of the benefits of the doubt." Charleton turned in his saddle to favor Douglas with a suspicious stare.

"I didn't double-cross you, Charleton," said Douglas, not without a simple dignity that may or may not have impressed his mentor. At any rate, Charleton made no reply.

Douglas was entirely deflated. He drooped dejectedly in the saddle, guiding the stiff and weary Moose without interest. His wonderful expedition by which he was to establish his standing as a man with his father and Judith had ended in ignominy. He watched Charleton's painfully rigid back, but did not dare speak to him until they were almost home. As they neared the edge of the forest-line, the ground became tapestried with lilies, yellow, white and crimson. Tree-trunks turned black against the blue sky that belled over the valley. As they descended, the Forest Reserve lifted gradually, a black-green sea beyond the burning brown level of the ranches. But Douglas was in no frame of mind either to seek or to see beauty. He had a guilty sense that Charleton believed that he had failed him, and finally he summoned courage to call,

"Doggone it, Charleton, I wanted to put it over, don't you suppose?"

Charleton did not answer, and when they crossed the cañon back of Rodman's, Douglas, hurt and resentful, turned the Moose into the home trail. He had gone almost beyond hailing-distance before Charleton called,

"Come down and see me soon, old cattle-rustler!"

Instantly Doug's spirits soared. He waved his hand with a grin and put the Moose to a trot.

IT WAS supper-time when he clanked into the kitchen. His father and mother were at the table.

"You're early, Doug!" exclaimed John.

Doug nodded.

"Where's Judith?"

"Keeping that mysterious date of hers. Maud, of course. She won't be home till late. I hope it's not with Inez. You look tired, Doug."

"I am. Jude makes me sick. She's harder to watch than a boy."

John laughed enigmatically and went out to finish his chores. Shortly Douglas followed him and told him the story of the miscarried adventure.

"I told Charleton not to let Scott in on it!" exclaimed John. "Serves him right. I sure got the laugh on Charleton this time."

"He's awful sore. Acts kind of suspicious of me," said Douglas ruefully.

"A guy like Charleton don't even trust himself." John pitched down a forkful of hay. "Have you any idea what Maud and Jude are up to?"

"No, sir. Are you worried about her?"

John laughed.

"As long as Scott Parson was with you, why worry? We'd ought to let young Jeff run that crook out of the valley."

"I'll do it myself some day." Douglas squared his big shoulders as he spoke. He still was very thin, and his clothes hung loose on him. But his father, looking him over, did not smile.

"Go to it, boy," he said.

Douglas had planned to lie awake until Judith returned, but the minute he touched his pillow he drooped into dreamless slumber, from which he did not waken until breakfast-time. John was scolding Judith when Doug reached the table.

"That's all right to be so highty-tighty. You can get away with that with your mother, but not with me. It was nearly three o'clock this morning when you came in."

"Oh, no, John! It wasn't that late," protested Mary anxiously.

"Now, Mary, don't put up one of your fool lies for the little devil. I know what time it was. What excuse have you, miss?"

Judith, who was looking tired but singularly self-satisfied, answered demurely:

"I was out on business, dad. And I'm going to get pay for it, too. A horse that will really buck."

John's face was flushing when Douglas spoke.

"Aw, let her keep her secret, dad. I don't think she's done a thing but rope a stray pony."

Judith protested quickly.

"Nothing of the kind! If you three just knew what I have done, you'd respect me. Anyhow, Doug, I know where you were. Over on Fire Mesa with Charleton Falkner."

"Who told you that?" grinned Douglas.

"Somebody that knew. Dad, why don't you get after Doug like you do after me? What was he doing over on Fire Mesa all night?"

"That's right, Doug. What were you doing on Fire Mesa?" asked John, all a broad smile now that infuriated Judith.

SHE jumped up from the table, took her milking-pail and went out. Nor did she give Douglas opportunity to talk to her during the rest of the day. Not until twilight had settled in the valley did Douglas find her alone. Then, searching for her, he found her behind the corral, curled up against the new alfalfa stack, her eyes on the sunset glow above Lost Chief Peak. He sat down beside her.

"I didn't mean to tease you this morning, Jude. I was just trying to steer dad off."

"But you always do think my stunts never amount to anything, Doug."

"Have I said a word like that lately? I can't help being anxious—can I?—when a girl like you stays out until three in the morning."

"Yes; you were so anxious your snores shook the house," returned Judith. "Now admit, Doug, that you really think it was nothing worth worrying about."

"Well, I don't see how it could be anything so very important."

"There! I knew it! Doug, I'm so proud of myself that if I don't tell some one I'll burst. Give me your word of honor you'll never give it away and I'll tell you."

"I swear I'll die before I'll peep!"

"Still think it's funny, don't you? All right, mister; prepare to faint. I was out helping Scott Parson run cattle." Douglas gasped. "There, Doug Spencer! You're such a wonder! Of course I didn't do the hardest part. Scott had got 'em all together in a corral before I got there. But I held the herd in a little cañon for a couple of hours while he got old Nelson off the scent. Then we drove 'em across the ridge, down into the desert country west of Mesa Pass. He's going to sell 'em in Wyoming City, and my share is a good bucking horse, like I told you."

Douglas sat perfectly still, so torn by conflicting emotions that, for a time, he was speechless. Finally from the chaos of his mind rose an overwhelming anger.

"Do you think that's a decent thing to do? A girl running cattle and with a confessed murderer at that? I sure am ashamed of you, Jude!"

"Can you beat a man?" cried Judith to the flaming heavens. "He won't even give me credit for being a cattle-wrangler! And he says he loves me."

Doug's voice was furious.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, stealing cattle and running round with that Inez Rodman."

"You just be careful of what you say, Doug Spencer!"

"Careful! Why should I be careful? You aren't careful!"

"I'm a whole lot better than you, at that! If it's so smart for you to do all these things, why isn't it for me?"

"A woman has to be good. It's her job to be good. If she isn't good in a cattle-country like this, everything goes to pieces."

"It's a wonder you men don't set us women an example," said Judith coolly.

"Don't I try to keep you straight?"

"Yeh! A wonderful example you set me!"

Douglas's voice broke with anger.

"Don't talk like a fool! The world isn't like that. The women have to be good. The men want 'em to be, no matter how hard they try to make them bad. And the more you care for a girl the more you want her to be perfect."

"The world is plumb loco and you with it!"

"You're as cold as a dead rabbit!" exclaimed Doug.

Judith laughed mirthlessly.

"Yes; I'm cold. I'm as cold as fire." And suddenly she put her head down on her knees and burst into tears.

Instantly Douglas melted. He put his arm about Judith and drew her head to his shoulder.

"Oh, Jude—don't! Don't! If I could only make you see it's my love for you makes me so mad!"

"You—you don't want me to have any fun," sobbed Judith. "How'd you like to be asked to give up everything yourself and stay home like a woman?"

"I wouldn't like it. But a regular girl oughtn't to want to do such things."

"Why not? I like horses and dogs and the wind on Fire Mesa just as much as you do. And dancing and hunting by moonlight, and getting away with somebody else's cattle and all of it. I love it! And you ask me to give it up because you want me to be good. What do you call 'good,' anyhow?"

Douglas did not answer at once. In the first place, Judith's flushed cheek in his neck upset his equilibrium, and, in the second place, he was overwhelmed with a sudden consciousness of the truth of Peter's statement that he had not a clean-cut idea to his name. But finally he stammered,

"Well, I call being good not drinking or stealing or being loose with men or any of those things—for a girl."

"And for a man?" asked Judith, sitting erect.

"Aw, who wants a man to be good?"

"I do," replied Judith, with a sudden thrilling intensity in her young voice. "I want his strength to be as the strength of ten, because his heart is pure."

"Judith, you really do?"

"Yes; I really do."

Douglas drew a long breath,

"Judith, would you want me to be that way?"

"I sure would!"

"Well then, Judith, so help me God, I will be!"

Judith put her slender, muscular hand in Doug's, swallowed hard once or twice, but said nothing. Then, the tense moment past, she asked,

"Honest, Doug, don't you think that was kind of a smart stunt of mine?"

"I certainly do"—with heartfelt conviction. "But I want you to promise me one thing—that you won't run any more cattle. Will you, Jude?"

"I'll promise you, if you'll promise me," returned Judith promptly.

"But it's different with a man," repeated Douglas.

"But you promised about that other."

"That was different. It was something personal between you and me. The other is business."

"All right. I won't promise unless you do."

"I can't promise, Jude. Honest, I can't."

Jude laughed and jumped to her feet.

"You are a goose, Doug, but I sure am fond of you." Then she left him.

Douglas sat still, arms clasped behind his head against the indescribable sweetness of the alfalfa hay, eyes on the wonder of the stars. Finally, he said aloud:

"I wish there was somebody a fellow could talk to that knew things. I wish my grandfather Douglas was alive."

His father passed by the haystack, pitchfork on shoulder.

"Who are you talking to, Doug?" he asked.

"The biggest fool in Lost Chief," replied Douglas, rising and following his father to the house.

THE following afternoon, when Douglas rode after the mail, he went round by the west trail to call on Charleton. He found the injured philosopher propped up in bed, reading the *Atlantic Monthly* and smoking a pipe. Mrs. Falkner and little Marian were in the corral doing the chores.

"Well, how's the Moose after his disappointment?" asked Charleton.

"Going strong. Any news of Scott?"

"No; I don't expect any news for a week—till I can get on my feet."

"I guess we might as well let him go and try again without him," said Doug, looking out the door at little Marian, who sat astride a saddleless mule which was doing its best to climb the corral fence.

Charleton grinned.

"No one can double-cross me without my taking some trouble to show him he can't do it twice—can they, Marian?"—as his wife came in with an arm-load of wood she had just split.

"You're as revengeful as a wolf, if that's what you mean," replied Mrs. Falkner. "Not that you've tried it on me."

Charleton gave her an amused glance not unmixed with admiration.

"I don't know that even a wolf would tackle a lynx cat," he chuckled.

DOUGLAS looked from the beautiful woman to the homelike room.

"You're a lucky chap, Charleton," he said suddenly.

Mrs. Falkner had picked up her sewing-basket.

"Nobody with a mind like Charleton's is so awful lucky," she said.

"Ouch!" grinned Charleton, and lighted his pipe afresh.

Douglas pondered on Mrs. Falkner's remark on his way back to the post-office. Peter was sitting on the door-step with Sister. The mail had been distributed, and most of Lost Chief had come and gone.

"That horse is tired, Doug," said Peter. "What have you been doing? Running him to break him?"

"Aw, he's all right!" protested Douglas. "Don't climb a tree about him, Peter. I want to talk to you. Make Sister move over."

"Sister," said Peter, "don't you want to go down and speak nice to your old friend Prince?"

Prince, standing before the platform with slavering tongue, bright eyes shining, wagged his tail in a conciliatory manner. Sister sniffed, growled, whimpered, then walked deliberately down the steps and said something to Prince. He barked, and they trotted over to the plains east of the post-office.

"She's got a dead coyote she keeps up there for her special friends," said Peter. "What's your trouble, Doug?"

Douglas sat down in Sister's place.

"I've been over to see Charleton, and his wife said something that struck me as queer." He repeated Marian's comment.

Peter laughed.

"The women in this valley beat any bunch I've seen anywhere. If the men were their equals, there wouldn't be a spot in the world could touch Lost Chief. What do you think of Charleton's mind, Doug?"

"I think he's a wonder. He's lived—that guy!"

"Any guy of forty has lived. It's the way they look at life that makes men different. Charleton hasn't any faith in anything good. That's why he's unlucky. Don't let him influence you too much, Doug. I like Charleton, but he's not good medicine for a boy of your kind. Have you thought anything about my offer of a couple of months ago?"

"Not much. I'm putting in most of my time worrying about Jude."

"Has she been doing anything special?"

"Well, yes. If I could just make her care for me, it would be easy. But, Peter, she cares a lot more for that poor old broken-down Swift than she does for me."

"She's just a child. You'll have to be patient, Doug."

"I am patient, Peter. But, in the mean time, Scott or dad—" He hesitated, then went on, "I tell you, this caring for a woman who don't care for you is hell."

Peter stared off toward Fire Mesa, with its rolling clouds of red, and answered seriously:

"Yes, it is, Douglas. But I told you in June all that I could think of in regard to Judith, and you got sore at me."

"Well, I'm not sore now. I was a fool. Here comes Jimmy Day. Give me my mail, Peter, and I'll beat it. I'm in no frame of mind to talk to a kid."

Jimmy, who was perhaps a year older than Douglas, pulled his sweating horse to its haunches. His dog, a mongrel collie, raced up the trail to meet the returning Sister and Prince. There was a whining colloquy; then the three dogs turned back.

"Must be a scandal somewhere," suggested Jimmy.

"No; just a dead coyote," said Peter. "Sister ran him down yesterday. Ain't a dog in the state outside of a greyhound can touch her."

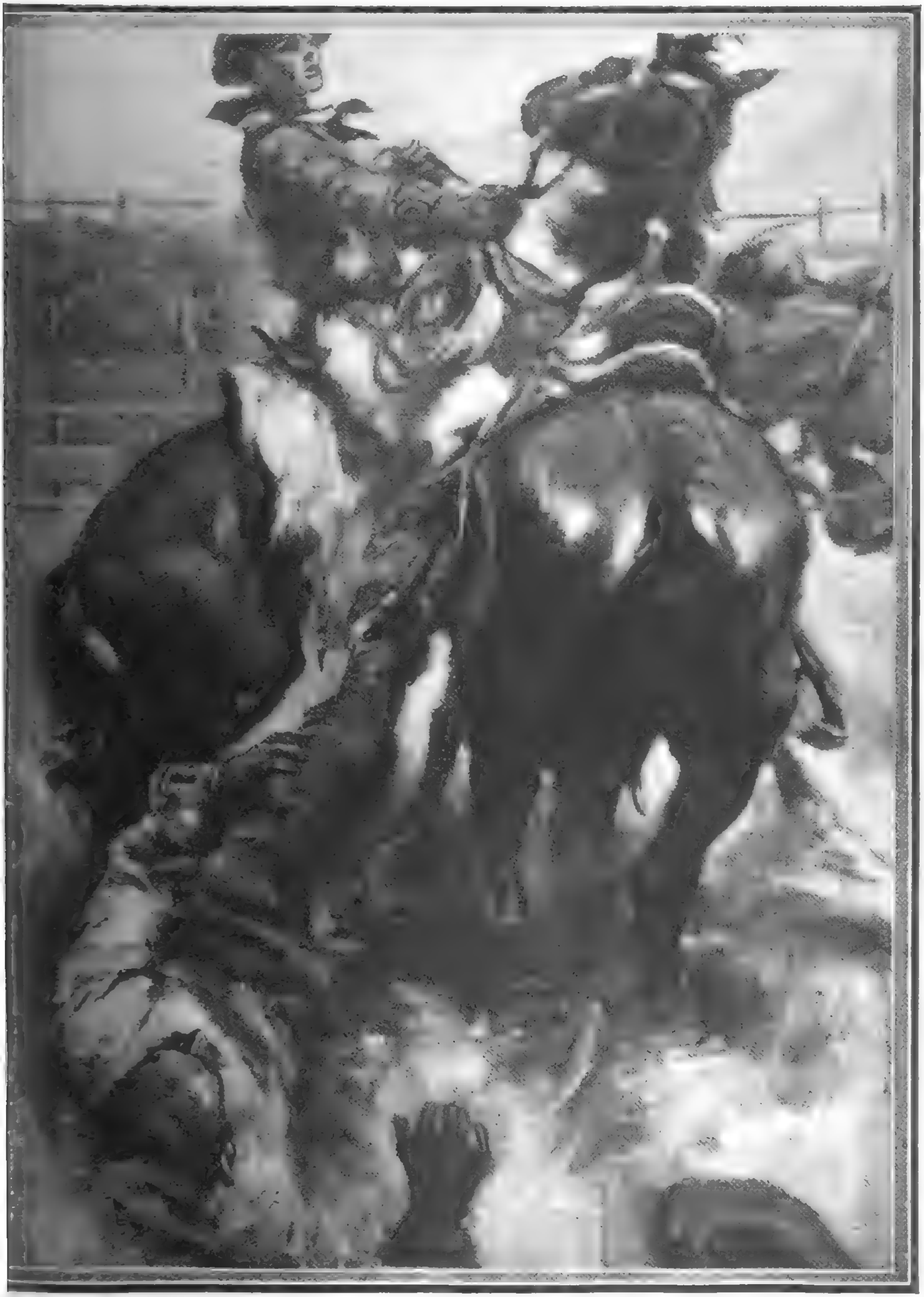
Douglas made a flying leap into the saddle while the Moose whirled on his hind legs.

"Some horse, Doug!" exclaimed Jimmy. "I'll swap this and a two-year-old heifer for him."

"I'm afraid he might hurt you. He's a regular man's horse, Jimmy." Douglas lighted a cigarette while the Moose reared.

"Thanks!" grunted Jimmy. "Say—did

Judith leaped from the saddle and, running before Sioux, seized his horns and



itself across his face. The bull paused. Douglas, on the Moose, caught Buster's bridle.

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you know Scott Parson has four young calves by one milch cow, all the same age? Re-markable man, Scott! Say—I was by there the other day, and there sat Scott in the corral on Ginger cracking a blacksnake at this fool cow to make her let those four slicks eat. He'll die rich—Scott will. He's the calf-gettingest rider in the Rockies."

DOUGLAS turned the Moose into the home trail. When he reached the ranch, Judith was strolling in the main corral with her arm about the neck of the bull Scott had given her. He would follow Judith about like a pet dog, but would allow no one else to touch him.

"When he is a little older, you won't be able to play with him that way, Jude," said Douglas, eying the pair with admiration not untinctured by apprehension.

It was a brilliant afternoon, with the westering sun throwing long golden shadows across old Dead Line Peak. The corral, with its fringe of quivering aspens a silvery lavender, the great red bull, the young girl with her noble proportions, holding the brute's ferocious head in the curve of her arm, made an unforgetable picture.

"He'll always be fond of me if I handle him right," said Judith; "won't you, Sioux? I'm going to saddle him some day, Doug."

"Well, not while I'm around!" exclaimed the young rider, as he pulled the bridle over the Moose's head. "Say, have you seen Scott yet?"

"No. Why?"

"I pity him. Charleton sure is after him."

"Charleton? Why?"

Douglas shrugged his shoulders.

"You ask Scott why." And he strode off to his chores.

Doug did not see Charleton again for several days, but one afternoon, about a week after the return from the hunt, they met at the post-office, and Charleton, who wanted to see John, rode home with him.

"Scott is back," said Doug.

"Yes; I saw him yesterday." Charleton smiled. "I found out who was his helper on that little deal."

"You did! How?" Douglas's voice was so sharp that the Moose jumped nervously.

"I bought the information. Swapped him something for it."

"Who was it? Do you believe him?" Doug spoke a little breathlessly.

"I don't know. I'm going to check up on it now."

"Charleton, who did he say it was? Please, Charleton—"

The older man turned to look suspiciously at Doug.

"How long have you known it?"

"You've no call to speak that way to me!" cried Douglas.

"Humph. Well, he says it was that young devil of a Jude."

"Look here, Charleton; don't say anything to my father about it. He'll go crazy."

"I don't know what I'll do. I'll talk to Jude first." And Charleton would say no more.

He found Judith in the milking-shed, and, while he talked to her there, Douglas engaged his father's attention in the living-room. Here Judith swept upon them.

"Doug Spencer, as long as I live I'll not speak to you again! You promise-breaker, you——"

"Wait, Jude! I haven't told anybody. Did I tell you, Charleton?"

"I've told her that you didn't, but she won't believe me." Charleton grinned.

"Scott wouldn't have told. Doug was the only one that knew." Judith paced the floor.

"What the devil has broke loose?" demanded John.

"Now you have started something, Jude," groaned Douglas.

"Judith! Do calm down!" pleaded her mother, who had taken her hands out of the biscuit-dough and now stood twisting her fingers in the doorway.

"Well," said Charleton, "I don't know any reason why I should keep quiet after the pretty names Jude has called me. It was Judith that helped Scott double-cross us up on Lost Chief Peak. She claims she didn't know it was our deal."

"She didn't, either!" cried Douglas.

John gasped.

"Jude! She got away with your cattle, Charleton? That sure Gawd is funny! Jude! O Lord!" And John burst into a tornado of laughter.

Judith stared at him uncertainly, as did her mother. Douglas scowled. Charleton lighted a cigarette.

"Of course it has its humorous side," said Charleton, as John's shouts died down.

"But I've served notice on Scott, and I serve notice on Judith now that I'm not the man who kisses the hand that spoils his deals."

This remark sobered John.

"You're right, too, Charleton. Jude, how'd you come to do such a fool thing?"

"How'd Doug and Charleton come to do such a fool thing?" asked Judith. "Scott and I had as good a right to run cattle off them as they had off Elijah Nelson."

"Oh, Judith! Judith!" exclaimed her mother.

"You know how I feel about Scott Parson!" cried John. "Jude, I'm going to punish you for this so you'll never forget it."

"In other words, if Doug runs cattle, he's admired. If I run cattle, I'm punished." Jude's fine eyes were flashing.

"Doug's a boy; you're a girl," replied John. "And I've told you to let Scott Parson alone."

"I wish I were dead!" exclaimed Jude.

"Well," said Charleton casually, "I must be getting back home." No one heeded him as he clanked out of the door.

"How are you going to punish Jude, dad?" demanded Douglas.

"Doug," cried Judith, "you keep out of my affairs from now on! I'll show you that you can't break a promise to me."

"Judith, I tell you that I never breathed a word."

"I know better. Scott wouldn't be such a fool. And he told me not an hour ago that Charleton said you'd given me away. And, anyhow, I think more of Scott Parson than I do of you and dad put together. He wants me to have as much of a chance as he has. He's not always jawing at me. He thinks I'm just right as I am."

Douglas drew himself up, angry and offended.

"You'll come after me, miss, before I speak to you again!"

"That's exactly what I want," retorted Judith.

During all this, Mary stood with the tears running down her cheeks, begging the two to stop quarreling. John leaned against the table, his eyes half closed.

"So that's how the land lies with Scott?" he shouted suddenly.

"Yes; and if you lay hands on me, I'll shoot you," said Judith succinctly.

"I know how to get you, miss," sneered John.

He rushed out of the house. A moment later he galloped past the window on Beauty. Judith walked defiantly to the door and looked after him. Douglas went out to the corral. Shortly John returned, leading Swift. He pulled up in front of the door and dismounted, kicked Swift in the haunch to make her turn, and before Judith could do more than start toward him from the door, he put his six-shooter to Swift's patient little head and pulled the trigger. Swift dropped to her knees and rolled over.

"Now, Jude, try it again and I'll give Buster a dose," said John, standing tense as he waited for the girl's attack.

But with a look of such horror that John recoiled, she stopped in her tracks. She threw her arms above her head with a groan, ran across the yard to the stable and climbed into the hay-loft. Douglas stood for a moment as if turned to stone. Then he picked up a bridle and went into the corral for the Moose. As he adjusted the saddle, John led Beauty to the fence.

"You finish those chores, Doug!"

Douglas went on tightening the cinch.

"It was just a broken-down cow-pony that should have been shot long ago," said John sullenly.

Douglas leaped into the saddle, took the fence like a swallow and was gone. Prince yelped on the trail before him.

WHERE he was going, Doug did not know. He thrust spurs into the Moose and sent him up the steep, barren side of Falkner's Peak until the horse was winded; then he dismounted and led him up and up until they both were exhausted. Then Doug looped the reins over a clump of sage-brush and dropped to the ground. Prince squatted beside him, panting.

A blind despair had engulfed Doug. He could think of nothing to do, nothing that would adequately punish his father, nothing that would solace Judith or bring her to her senses.

Nothing is so intolerably bitter to youth as its first realization of the fact that one is helpless to change life as it is. Douglas, biting his nails and railing at the heavens, was draining one of life's bitterest drinks. He was in deep trouble, utterly alone, and he had no spiritual star for guidance.

But when he finally descended the mountainside he had taken a resolve. He was going to leave home for a while. He was going to work for Charleton, who was greatly in need of a rider. He was not yet of age, but he was not afraid of John's forcing him to return.

His father and mother were in bed when he reached home. Judith's bed was empty. Douglas went out to the stable and climbed noiselessly to the loft. On the hay close to the open door lay Judith, her face dimly outlined in the moonlight. She was still sobbing in her sleep. Douglas stood looking down on her till his own eyes were tear-blinded. Then he knelt in the hay and kissed her softly on the lips. She stirred but did not waken, and he slipped back to the ladder and down without a sound.

He went to bed at once, but was up in the morning before his father. He wrote a note, which he left on the kitchen table.

I am going to work for Charleton till things are better here at home. DOUGLAS.

He found Charleton grooming Democrat.

"Charleton," he said, "you made a lot of trouble for Jude last night."

"What happened?" asked Charleton.

Douglas told him.

"That was a rotten trick!" exclaimed Charleton. "I just thought he'd lick her. John's got a mean temper."

"I want to work for you a while, Charleton. I'm sick of the rows at home."

"John willing?"

"I haven't asked him."

Charleton grinned.

"I need a rider, sure. You finish currying Democrat while I go in and talk to the missus. Little Marian's visiting at Lone Bend. Maybe my wife will think it's too much cooking for two men."

But he came back in a little while, smiling cheerfully.

"Come in to breakfast. It's all right."

So Douglas settled to riding for Charleton Falkner. His father did not come after him, and when the two met on the Black Gorge trail a day or so after Doug's departure, John returned the boy's muttered greeting with a silent, ugly stare. There was comment and conjecture in Lost Chief, but the fall round-up was coming, and this soon engrossed the attention of the community. Of Scott, Douglas saw nothing.

THE fall slipped into winter, which in Lost Chief Country begins in September, and Christmas passed with none of the Spencers at the schoolhouse party except Judith, who attended with Scott. February slipped into March, and Douglas's eighteenth birthday passed unnoted. The snows were too deep to allow Charleton to undertake any of those mysterious missions for which he was so much admired, and Elijah Nelson was allowed to flourish unmolested. It was reported that he had accused Lost Chief of running some of his cattle, but he evidently had no desire to start a controversy with the valley. And Douglas came more and more under Charleton's influence.

Peter Knight, watching the boy more closely than Doug at all realized, was deeply troubled.

"How are you and Judith making it, Doug?" Peter asked Douglas one Sunday afternoon early in April when he and the young rider were sunning themselves in the post-office door.

"You know Judith hasn't spoken to me since last August," replied Doug.

"Too bad!" grunted Peter.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Douglas. "I don't see much to this marriage-game, anyhow. Look at the couples round here and point me out any of 'em that's been married over five years that are really in love. Just a houseful of brats and a woman to nag you."

"Dry up, Doug! You are just quoting Charleton Falkner. I've heard plenty of his empty ideas in the last twenty years. You've worked for him long enough, anyhow. Better go back to your home, or, if you're through with Jude, take my offer and go East to school."

"Forget it, Peter! As soon as Fire Mesa opens up, I'm going after wild horses with Charleton. And you can roast him all you want to, but he knows life."

"Knows your foot!" snorted Peter. "If anybody could catch Charleton with his skin off, we'd find he gets happiness and sorrow out of the same things the rest of us do. He's just a big bluff, Charleton is."

"He's lived too much to let anything get him," said Douglas stoutly.

Peter laughed.

"Nobody can accuse you of having lived too much, Douglas. Get out now; I want to close up."

Douglas rode back to his job. He had reason, several days later, to think of Peter's comments on Charleton. Very early in the morning Charleton roused him and told him to ride like forty furies after Grandma Brown. Douglas obeyed him literally and arrived at the Browns' ranch with the Moose in a sweating lather.

When he banged on the door, Grandma, clutching her night-dress at the throat, put her head out.

"Marian's baby, I suppose!" she snapped. "Is little Marian there?"

"Yes."

"Well, let me dress."

"Hurry, please, Grandma! Charleton seemed awful scared."

"Charleton! Huh! I'm going to get my proper clothes on and drink my coffee, no matter how Charleton Falkner worries. He always was a booby. You go saddle Abe."

Abe was saddled and the Moose was breathing normally before Grandma appeared, plump and calm. Nor would she allow Abe to be hurried out of his usual gentle trot.

"Douglas, when you've seen as many new eyes open and old eyes close as I have, you'll quit hurrying," she said. "The Almighty generally looks out for mothers, anyhow."

So, sedately, in the glory of the sun bursting over the top of the Indian range, they trotted up to Falkner's cabin.

Charleton burst out of the door.

"Where in the blank blank have you been? Hurry, Grandma! I've been nearly crazy!"

"I'll bet your wife ain't crazy." Grandma dismounted with Doug's help. "Now, Douglas, you keep this lunatic outside, no matter what he says or does. It's just the way he acted when little Marian came." She stamped into the house.

"Let's go do the chores," suggested Douglas.

"Chores! Chores! Don't you know that——"

"Yes; I know all about it," interrupted Doug. "Come on and get the milking done. Are you afraid your wife will die, Charleton, or what?"

"Or what?" gasped Charleton. "You poor, half-baked idiot!"

For an hour Douglas sweated with Charleton. Then, as they rested for a time on the corral gate, the kitchen door opened and Grandma's head appeared.

"You go, Doug," said Charleton feebly. But Grandma did not wait.

"It's a boy, Charleton!" she shrieked. "A fine, big boy!" And she closed the door.

Charleton sat pefectly still on the fence. His lips moved, but for several seconds no sound came forth. Then he said:

"Charleton Falkner, junior! Charleton Falkner, junior! All my life I've been waiting for this moment." Tears were on his cheeks. "Doug, you go up and ask 'em how my wife is and give her my love."

Douglas stared at his mentor wonderingly, unwound his long legs from the fence and crossed the yard. Grandma answered his timid rap.

"Charleton says how's his wife and sends his love."

"Oh, he does?"—witheringly. "Why don't he go over to the post-office and telephone us? You tell him she did fine, like she always does everything. You folks go up and get Peter to give you some breakfast."

"I'm not going near Peter till I see the boy and my wife," called Charleton.

Grandma slammed the door.

"I wouldn't go near the post-office," said Douglas, established again on the fence beside Charleton.

"Why not?"

"If—if I felt like you do, I'd want to stay by myself, just take a ride alone up to the top of Fire Mesa."

"I don't care what I do as long as the boy's here. Charleton Falkner, junior! I'll tell you, Doug, you'll never know what happiness life can hold for you till a woman like Marian gives you a son."

"Say!" cried Douglas in an outraged voice. "What's all this talk you've been giving me for a year about whisky and women and horses?"

Charleton did not hear him.

"Charleton Falkner, junior," he was murmuring over an unlighted cigarette.

IT WAS a disjointed day, of course. In the afternoon Charleton went to a gathering of choice spirits in the post-office, and Douglas, feeling particularly lonely and unsettled, rode up the south trail after three of Charleton's young mules which had strayed. He had no luck, and long after twilight had brought the frost and stiffened the mud of the heavy trails, he brought the Moose up before Inez Rodman's corral.

HE HAD never been back there since his talk with Inez in June. He sat down moodily on the lowest bar of the buck fence in the shadow of the Moose and wondered why he had come. He had been eying the house uncertainly but a few moments when two riders came up the trail. They pulled up in the dooryard.

"I don't think I want to dance after all, Scott," said Judith's voice.

"What harm is there in us having a waltz in here?" demanded Scott.

"Not any—only, I don't feel like seeing Inez to-night."

"I suppose you're jealous because Doug's soft on her."

"How do you know Doug's soft on her?"

"Why, he's over here half the time."

Doug jumped to his feet, ran over to the rider and struck him.

"That's a dirty lie! Get down and fight me with your fists, you thief and murderer!" Doug's voice was low with passion.

There was a quick movement of Scott's right hand to his hip, and Douglas felt a stinging pain in his left shoulder. Simultaneously with the shot, Scott put the spurs to Ginger, and Doug reeled as the mare's shoulder thrust against him. Judith jumped from Buster.

"Doug, did he get you?"

Douglas had not fallen. He pushed the girl aside and ran to the plunging Moose. Inez Rodman called from the door:

"Who's shooting?"

Still without speaking, Douglas threw himself on his horse and was off after the dim figure that raced down the west trail which led to the pass. He did not heed Judith's call or the quick patter of hoofs behind him. On and on through the frosty April night, Prince barking joyfully before, the Moose galloping at top speed, the stars sliding overhead; on past the Browns' noisy corral, past Falkner's brightly lighted cabin and up the lifting trail to the pass. The broken black line of the pass, usually so clean-cut against the stars, looked wavering and uncertain. Douglas drooped forward and put his arms about the Moose's neck.

Once in a while a horse is born with as much acumen as a mule plus the sensibility of a dog. The Moose, when he felt Doug's arms about his neck, dropped from a gallop to a trot and from a trot to a walk. Shortly, when Judith called, "Whoa up, Moose!" he stopped and stood nickering uneasily. Judith dismounted and pulled the reins over Buster's head. Then she ran up to put her hand on Doug's knee.

"Doug! Doug! Where did he get you?"

"Don't hold me back, Jude!" said Douglas thickly. "Tie me on to the Moose and leave me after him. I'm going to finish him now."

"You can't catch him. You're hurt too bad. Let me take you home, Doug."

There was no reply for a moment. The Moose moved his head uneasily up and down. Then, breathing heavily and brokenly, Douglas said,

"Not—while you—think I told—Charleton."

That was the last he knew for some time. When he returned to consciousness, Peter and Judith were half dragging him, half lifting him into the post-office.

"I don't care what you want, Jude," Peter was saying; "you aren't going to drag him another hour over the trail. We'll get him into my bed and see how bad off he is."

"My shoulder!" grunted Douglas.

"All right, Doug. Now, Judith, one more heave on to the bed. Get off there, Sister. Jude, pass me that bottle of whisky, then go lock the outside door so's no one can bother till I've finished. Then come back here."

Judith, her eyes wide and brilliant, her cheeks feverish, obeyed without a word. She drew off Doug's short leather rider's coat and cut off his blood-saturated shirt and undershirt. Douglas watched her with beads of sweat on his lips. Peter, in the mean time, had thrust his late supper back from the front of the stove and put a couple of disreputable-looking towels to boil in the dish-pan. When Judith had finished, and Doug's beautiful thin torso lay white against the dingy Indian blanket, Peter scoured his hands and examined the hole in the shoulder from which the blood pulsed slowly.

"It's gone clean through from front to back," said Peter cheerfully. "Guess I can fix him. Eight years in the regular service is useful sometimes. Come here and hold him, Jude. I'm going to clean this hole with peroxide, and he'll try to climb the wall."

"No, I won't. Go to it," whispered Douglas.

Nor did he, for as Peter, with a piece of stovepipe wire he had boiled as a probe, began his very thorough process of sterilization, Douglas quietly fainted. When he came to his senses, his shoulder was bandaged and Judith was drawing on an old shirt of Peter's over his head.

"Now, Judith, make a fresh pot of coffee and drink some of it," said Peter. "You are as white as a sheet. How are you, Doug, my boy?"

"Fine! Peter, you get me drunk—I'm going after Scott to-night."

"Let's have the story." Peter's lips were grim. "You begin, Judith."

JUDITH set the coffee-pot on the stove and perched on the edge of the bed. She drew a deep breath and began at once.

"I was riding past Inez's place with Scott. He teased me to go in for a dance. When I wouldn't go, he asked me if I was sore at Inez because Douglas spent half his time there with her. Doug must have been behind his horse. He came out like a crazy man, called Scott a liar and told him to come down and fight, and he hit Scott. Scott drew on him and shot him. Then he rode away like mad, and Doug after him. I followed and caught Doug part-way up the pass and brought him here."

Judith paused, and Peter turned to Douglas.

"All correct, Doug?"

But the young rider was staring at Judith.

"Did you believe Scott, Judith?" he demanded.

"How do I know what you've been up to? You were there to-night."

"I hadn't seen Inez. I haven't been near her place since I made you a promise once. I went over to-night because I was discouraged. I'd made up my mind that there wasn't anything real about anybody. Even Charleton isn't real. Now, Peter, you give me a quart of whisky and help me onto the Moose. I'll——"

"You'll calm down—that's what you'll do," said Judith succinctly. "Won't he, Peter? When Scott finds he hasn't killed you, he'll be back, and then you can settle with him. Peter, you telephone my mother I'm going to stay down here for a while and take care of Doug."

Peter hesitated.

"I don't need you, Jude; though, of course, it'll be pleasant to have you here."

"It's just as well you feel that way," said Judith, "because I intend to stay anyhow."

Douglas blinked round-eyed at Judith, then smiled seraphically and closed his eyes. He was asleep before Peter had succeeded in getting Mrs. Spencer on the telephone. All Lost Chief was on a party-line, and he carried on his conversation not without difficulty. Judith sat listening with a broad grin of appreciation.

"Hello, Mary! This is Peter Knight. Doug had an accident and I have him here with me. . . . Oh, Inez telephoned you? Well, Judith overtook him and brought him here. He's in no particular danger. . . . That you, Grandma? How's Marian? . . . No; it was Scott drew on Doug. Wait a minute till I finish with his mother. Listen, Mary; don't get excited. . . . You keep quiet, Inez. Everybody butt out! Now, listen, you folks, if you've got to, but don't interrupt. Scott said something that riled Doug, and Doug hit him. Scott drew and got Doug through the left shoulder, bad but clean, and I've got the wound dressed— Say, if you women don't keep quiet I'll sure Gawd hang up. Oh, hello, Charleton! . . . Yes; Scott made a clean getaway. Now, listen, Mary; I'm going to keep Judith here to-night to help me, and you can come down to-morrow. . . . Yes; that you, John? Well, you come along now, but not Mary. She's too weepy. . . . What's that you say, Inez? The sheriff and Jimmy gone out after Scott? When did they start? Hello, Mrs. Day! . . . Half an hour ago? That's good. Now, listen, John; you stop by here before you go crazy. Understand me? All right! Good-night, everybody!" He turned from the telephone with a wry smile. "John's coming down."

"He's been worse than a wolverene since Doug left," said Judith.

"How do you and he get along?" asked Peter, sitting down to his belated supper.

"Oh, I patch along for mother's sake. I'm going out to put the horses up."

John came in while she was still on this mission. He nodded to Peter and strode over to the bed. Douglas opened his eyes.

"Doug," said John, "before I go out after Scott, tell me it's all right between us. Judith made up long ago."

"Jude made up?" repeated Douglas, with weak incredulity. "I don't believe it. Anyhow"—wearily—"it's not something you can make up about. It was just one more thing to knock out a fellow's faith in things."

"But you'll come home, Doug?"—eagerly.

"If Jude'll believe I never told Charleton."

"If I make Scott admit that he squealed, will you come home?"

"Yes; but it won't keep me from shooting him up as soon as I get well."

"That's all right. But you get well first."

John turned from the bed with the look of sullenness wiped from his face. He was holding a low-voiced colloquy with Peter on the character of Doug's injury when Judith came in. She nodded at John.

"What were you doing with Scott?" he demanded in a menacing tone.

"Look here, John"—Peter's voice could be very persuasive when he wished it to be—"suppose you leave the two kids alone with me for few days without rowing either of them. I'll tan their hides if necessary."

"You! Humph. Why, my father would have beat me with a chain if I'd ever tried the disobedience these kids put over on me." And he clanked out of the door.

Douglas closed his eyes.

"YOU make yourself a bed on the floor, Judith," said Peter. "I'll keep the fire going and an eye on Douglas to-night, and to-morrow you can take your turn."

Judith answered pleadingly:

"I'm not one bit tired or sleepy, Peter. And I almost never get a chance to talk alone with you. Let me sit up with you."

Peter's long, harsh face softened.

"All right, Jude! We'll keep the old coffee-pot going and make a night of it. I'm going to wash that wound of Doug's every hour. This cattle country's the devil for infection."

"Oughtn't we to take him up to Mountain City?" asked Judith anxiously. "We could get young Jeff's auto."

"At the first sign of trouble I will," replied Peter; "but I'll bet I've had more experience in handling gunshot wounds than Doc Winston. Sister, get down; you can't sleep on the bed to-night."

"I wonder if they'll fight if I let Prince in? He's having a fit over Doug, I know."

"Sister would chew him to rags. But I suppose the pup is worried. We'll just turn Sister out and let Prince in to have a look at Doug."

Sister, accordingly, was shoved out the door, snapping at the joyfully entering Prince as she went. Prince wagged his yellow tail at Judith and Peter, then put his fore paws on the bed and gazed anxiously at Douglas. He sniffed at the wounded shoulder, wriggled and gave a short, sharp bark. Doug opened his eyes.

"It's all right, Prince."

Prince licked Doug's cheek.

"So that's understood," said Peter, taking Prince by the collar, "and you can just step out and talk it over with gentle little Sister."

Douglas closed his eyes again. Judith sat down on the floor, her back against the bed. Peter lighted his pipe and put a fresh panful of towels on to boil before settling himself in his home-made armchair.

"I understand Scott gave you a little wild mare that's a real bucker," he said.

"He didn't give her to me. It was pay for some work I did for him."

"Uh-huh. What do you aim to do with her?"

"Keep her unbroke for the Fourth-of-July rodeo. And, Peter, I'm going to enter my Sioux bull for some stunts."

"Dangerous work, I'd say. What kind of stunts?"

The young girl chuckled.

"You wait and see. That Sioux weighs a good two thousand pounds, and he thinks he's a bear cub."

"Bear cub! I don't know what John Spencer's thinking of," grunted Peter.

"John doesn't think. He just feels," said Judith. There was a short silence, which the girl broke by saying, "Peter, were you ever in love?"

The postmaster took his pipe from his mouth, stared at Judith's earnest eyes, put the pipe back and replied,

"Yes."

"How many times?"

"How many times? Can you really be in love more than once, Judith?"

"Now, what's the use of saying that to me, Peter? I'm not a baby."

"In many ways you are," returned Peter,

serenely. "Why this interest in love? What's his name?"

"I'm not sure it's any one. But, of course, I think a lot about it. You aren't laughing, are you, Peter?"

"God forbid! I feel much more like crying."

Judith smiled up at him doubtfully.

"Crying?"

"Yes; you are so young, Jude! I hate to think of your dreams going by you."

"Well, I'm not such a kid as you think I am. I'll bet I know all there is to know about love."

"My God, Judith, you don't even know the real thing when it's offered you! All you know is the rot you've seen all your life. Love!"

Peter snorted derisively. Judith gave a little shiver of excitement.

"Well, if you know so much about love, Peter, what is it?"

"I don't know what it is, except that all of it, every aspect of it, understand, is bred right here." He tapped his forehead. "It begins in the brain, not in the body. Love is not lust, Judith." Judith scowled thoughtfully. Peter let the thought soak in; then he said, "And when real love comes, it takes possession of your mind and turns it into heaven and hell."

"Is that the way it came to you, Peter?"

"Yes."

"How many times?"

"Twice. And I wouldn't want to endure it again."

"There's a poem like that," said Judith, somewhat blushingly. "Do you mind poetry? I read lots of it."

"One should at sixteen," returned the postmaster. "No; I don't mind poetry. What were you thinking of?"

Judith, still blushing, gave a cautious glance at the bed and began:

"He who for love hath undergone
The worst that can befall
Is happier thousandfold than he
Who never loved at all.
A grace within his soul hath reigned
Which nothing else can bring.
Thank God for all that I have gained
By that high suffering!"

Peter, watching Judith with something deeply sad in his blue eyes, nodded when she had finished.

"Youth!" he muttered. "Youth!"

"Do you believe it, Peter?" demanded Judith.

"Yes, I do. Girl, how much high suffering will you get out of your goings-on with Scott?"

"None at all, Peter."

"I wish I were twenty years younger," said Peter.

"If you were twenty years younger, you wouldn't be so wise as you are now."

"And what happiness has wisdom brought me?" exclaimed Peter.

"It must be mighty fine to really know things," said Judith.

"What kind of things?"

"Oh, love and all that kind of thing."

"I'd like a drink of water, please!" Douglas opened his eyes.

"Have you been listening, Douglas?" demanded Judith.

"I don't think I missed any of it." Doug smiled. "You're growing up, Jude."

Judith tossed her head.

"I think it was rotten of you to listen to my conversation with another man." And although she and Peter talked in a desultory way until dawn, the vasty subject of love was not mentioned again.

ABOUT ten o'clock the next morning Charleton Falkner came to see Douglas. He hardly had established himself when the thunder of many hoofs sounded without; a wrangling of dogs began, and John Spencer thrust open the door to Peter's living-quarters. He was spattered with mud from head to foot. So was Scott Parson, who followed him, as well as Sheriff Frank Day and Jimmy Day, who brought up the procession.

Judith, who had been washing dishes, hastily dumped the dish-water out of the window. Charleton, with his familiar sardonic grin, propped Douglas up on the pillows.

"What're you bringing him in here for, John?" demanded Peter harshly. "Doug's in no state for a row."

"I don't know why not!" exclaimed Douglas coolly. "I don't have to talk or listen with my shoulder. Where'd you pick him up, dad?"

"Never mind that," replied John impatiently. "He's here. What do you want done with him, Doug?"

All eyes focused on Scott. In mud-spattered chaps and leather coat, his sombrero on the back of his head, a cigar hanging from his hard, handsome mouth, Scott leaned easily against the table, eying Judith. Douglas looked from Scott to Judith, and from Judith out of the window, where beyond the yellow green of rabbit-bush that carpeted the valley, there lay the green shadow of the Forest Reserve. After a moment's thought, he said,

"What made you draw on me like that, Scott?"

"I thought you'd pulled your gun."

"I punched you right and left. You knew I hadn't pulled a gun. As far as I'm concerned, you're too free and easy with that six-shooter of yours."

"He's the gun-pullingest guy in the Rockies," volunteered Jimmy Day.

"All I want to say," Doug announced, "is that when I get use of my shooting arm again, I'm going to pot Scott on sight."

Peter looked at Douglas's tanned face beneath the tumbled golden hair.

"Let's sit down," said Peter, "and go over this thing carefully. Scott's leading with the wrong foot in this valley, but I don't know as shooting him on sight is the answer."

SCOTT and Jimmy perched on the table, John and Judith on the foot of the bed. The others found chairs. Doug stared at Peter, at first with resentment, then with an air of curiosity.

"Don't you try any soft stuff, Peter," protested John. "Scott's worn his welcome out in Lost Chief, and that's all there is to it."

"My folks came here a year before yours did, John," retorted Scott. "I've got as good a right in this valley as anybody."

"Nobody that makes a nuisance of himself has got any rights in this valley," asserted Douglas. "I suppose you think because your grandfather killed Indians here you've got a right to shoot white men. Well, sir, I'm going to teach you different."

"Pot-shooting at him isn't going to teach him anything except perhaps what is over the Great Divide, Doug," said Peter dryly.

Scott laughed sardonically.

"The law has got something to say in this case," announced the sheriff, lighting a small black pipe.

"No, it hasn't!" exclaimed Douglas. "Not if I don't want it to."

"You aren't the whole of Lost Chief, Doug," said Charleton. "I've got a small grudge to settle with Scott myself."

"And I've got several," added John.

"Enjoy yourself, folks," suggested Scott, winking openly at Judith.

This infuriated John.

"Jude, you clear out! Scott, you blank, blank——"

Douglas flung up a protesting hand.

"Oh, cut that, dad! Judith, you stay right where you are. You're at the bottom of this whole trouble, and I want you to see and hear it."

"Draw it mild, Douglas," protested the postmaster. Judith did not move.

"What happens next?" inquired Jimmy Day.

Nobody spoke for a moment, then, very deliberately, Peter turned to the sheriff.

"You remember Doug's mother, don't you, Frank? I can't help thinking how much he looks like her to-day, although he's the image of John."

"Remember her! I tried for five years to get her to marry me. But her old dad wouldn't stand for it."

"You mean she couldn't see you because of me, Frank?" exclaimed John, a sudden light in his handsome eyes.

Douglas again favored the postmaster with a contemplative stare.

"Some old wolf, her dad, I've heard," Peter went on.

"He was," agreed the sheriff. "He ran the valley, and he ran it right. Every Fourth of July he made a speech about making Lost Chief the Plymouth Rock of the West."

Charleton Falkner roared.

"I remember those speeches."

Peter was grinning.

"But, in spite of them, from what I've heard I believe he came mighty near being a great man—old Bill Douglas."

"What did he lack?" demanded Douglas.

"Religion," answered Peter promptly.

"Religion? What's that?" asked John, with a guffaw. "You never had any, Peter."

"Right!" agreed Peter. "Worse luck for me that I didn't have that kind of a mind! But I know any kind of a social idea fails without it. And I know if old Bill Douglas had built a church up there beside the schoolhouse, the chances are that Scott wouldn't have plugged Douglas last night. And, mind, I don't believe in God or the hereafter or any of the dope they drug you with."

"What are you driving at, Peter?" demanded Charleton.

"Say!" shouted John. "Is this a trial or a sermon?"

"It's neither," replied Peter. "We're just talking things over. My idea is that Doug shall sort of sit in judgment on Scott and the rest of us abide by his decision."

"Now, listen here!" exclaimed Scott. "This may be a funny joke, but I don't see it."

Charleton laughed.

"I'm with you, Peter. Only, that won't pay my grudge."

John laughed, too, with a little glance of pride toward his son's set white face.

"I'm on! Make it include his leaving Jude alone."

"Aw, you folks act plumb loco!" snarled Scott.

"Wait and see! Wait and see!" protested Peter. "And while Doug thinks it over, let me add something to what we were saying about old Bill Douglas. He used to act as a kind of unofficial judge in the valley." The others nodded. "Did he ever," Peter went on, "make an important decision that he didn't try to look to the good and the future of Lost Chief? At least, I gathered that from the things Doug's mother used to tell me about the old man's pipe-dreams."

John said soberly:

"He was a just man. They don't make 'em that way any more."

"He was more than just," insisted Peter. "He was forward-looking. But he led with the wrong foot. He laughed at the Church."

"Sure he did!" agreed Charleton. "Why not? Remember old Fowler? A fine sample of the Church!"

Peter rose and paced the floor a moment.

"Let me tell you folks something: I laugh at the cant they've wrapped the Church up in, but I don't laugh at the system of ethics Christ taught. I'm here to tell you folks He put out the finest, most workable system of ethics the world has ever known. And folks can't live together without a system of ethics."

"It's a wonder you don't subscribe to 'em, Peter," gibed Charleton.

"It's too late. But that don't say that I don't realize clearly that I've failed in life because of it. What do you say to that, Charleton?"

Charleton's lips twisted.

"I say what the Persian poet said:

"Why all the saints and sages who discussed
Of the two worlds so wisely—they are thrust
Like foolish prophets forth: their words to scorn
Are scattered and their mouths are stopt with dust."

John laughed. Peter shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Suit yourselves. As for me, I believe everybody is destined sooner or later to deal squarely with right and wrong. Sooner or later every community has to wrestle with the question of social ethics or fail. Fate has written it of Lost Chief—you'll see."

"I'm with you there." Frank Day spoke soberly. "I believe in fate. You can't ride these hills and not. It's all written beforehand."

Douglas cleared his throat.

"I've got an idea"—hesitatingly. "I've been thinking for a long time that somebody in Lost Chief that has a homestead right ought to homestead that shoulder of Lost Chief Mountain that cuts off Elijah Nelson from our valley. If we don't, he will. I can't do it, because I'm not of age. But Scott can, and he can find plenty of work for that six-shooter of his worrying the Mormons and keeping 'em out of Lost Trail. I'll agree to let Scott alone if he'll let me alone and undertake that job."

THERE was silence, Scott staring at Douglas with a mixture of contempt, belligerency and surprise in his face.

"But," protested John, "that's no punishment, and it don't say a thing about Judith."

Douglas shifted his feet impatiently.

"I'm not going to punish any guy for running after Jude. That's a fair fight. What I'm sore about is his lying about me, and shooting at me when I wasn't armed."

"I'd planned," said Scott gruffly, "to try to buy back our old place from the Browns. They've got more than they can carry, and I'm sure getting nowhere renting that piece from Charleton."

"And," suggested Charleton, with a grin, "if you encourage those broncos of yours, they each might have three or four slicks every spring, and if you keep up practise with the blacksnake on the old milch cow——"

"Dry up, Charleton!" exclaimed Peter. "What do you think of the idea, Frank?"

"It ain't bad," answered the sheriff slowly; "though I ain't afraid of the Mormons coming in."

"That's where you are wrong," said Charleton. "They are going to get Lost Chief Valley by any straight or crooked method they can think up. With an ornery devil like Scott to climb over, they won't try to come in that entrance—that's sure."

"How about it, Scott?" asked the sheriff.

"I'd just as soon, and I'd just as soon say that I sure went crazy when Doug gave me those two good ones, and I did what I wouldn't have done if I'd taken time to think."

"All right!" grinned Douglas. "Nobody is going to kick if you don't take time to think over in the Mormon valley."

Sheriff Day rose with a laugh.

"Well, I've got to get to the alfalfa field I'm plowing. Come on, Jimmy!"

Jimmy rose to his good six feet of height and pulled on his gloves.

"I feel like I'd been praying," he said. "That is, if I'd ever heard a prayer, I'd say so." He made a face at Judith and followed his father.

John Spencer looked from Douglas to Peter and from Peter to Charleton with a little lift of his chin. Then he said,

"When are you coming home, Doug?"

"Not till Jude believes I didn't tell on her last summer."

"I'll get the truth out of Scott!" exclaimed John, drawing his six-shooter.

"Aw, put it up, John, you feather-brain, you!" drawled Scott. "I told Charleton, Jude. He paid me for the information. I never supposed he'd hold it against a girl."

Judith turned very red.

"Scott Parson, I hope you go up that Mormon valley and that they get you, you blank, blank double-crosser you!"

Scott shrugged his shoulders. Judith glared at each of the men in turn.

"I hate you all, every one of you!" she cried. "What chance has a girl among you? You're just like a lot of coyotes after a rabbit."

"Rabbit! Say lynx cat, Jude," laughed John.

Judith turned her head and rushed out of the room. The men laughed hugely as she banged the door. Only Douglas remained sober.

"Well," said John, "I suppose you'll be home in a day or two, Doug."

"If Charleton can find some one, I will be."

"I'll give him half-time," volunteered Scott.

"Nothing doing!" replied Charleton. "Nobody gets a second chance to double-cross me." Scott flushed angrily, but shrugged his shoulders. Charleton went on, "Of course, Charleton, junior won't be able to ride for a month or so, but Jimmy Day will help me out in the mean time."

"Son smoke yet?" asked Peter.

"No; I have to spend so much time doing jury duty on my neighbors I haven't got round to teaching him. He weighs a big ten pounds, the little bear cub!"

"Come on; let's get out," said Scott.

THEY clanked out, leaving Douglas with Peter. He fell asleep almost at once. When he awoke in the afternoon, Judith was sitting beside the bed, chin on palm, her eyes on Doug. Peter was not to be seen.

"Well, Judith," he said, "it's been a long time, hasn't it?"

Judith nodded.

"I've been sitting here thinking how much you've changed. You were just a boy last summer. Now you look like a man, lying there."

"You've changed yourself. Judith, you are beautiful!"

"Doug! You're as silly as dad."

"Has he—Judith—" Douglas's cheeks flushed. "Judith, don't play with dad—don't!"

"He can't harm me. Don't be foolish, Doug! How's little Marian?"

"Same as usual. You knew she was engaged to Jimmy?"

"I knew she ought to be," replied Judith bluntly. "They sure are a good-looking pair. When will they get married?"

"When Jimmy has a good start with his herd. Judith, Charleton isn't a bit like what I thought he was."

"He's an ornery mean devil, if you ask me," said Judith succinctly.

"He always was talking to me against marriage and kids and everything like that, but he just went plumb loco with happiness yesterday when the boy came."

Judith nodded.

"Well, he and I agree on the marriage question. I'd sooner be dead than married. Just look at the couples round here."

"What's the matter with them?" demanded Douglas.

"They don't love each other."

"Pshaw! How do you know?"

"I know they don't. There is nothing to this marriage business. No sir!"

"Aw, and you quoting love-poetry to Peter last night!"

"Sure I was! Certainly. I'm not idiot enough to say there's no such thing as love. But I do know that a few years of marriage kills it. Yes sir!"

Douglas went into a brown study for a time; then he said,

"I wonder why."

"They get sick of each other. Why, I get tired of my own mother. I certainly could not stand a man round underfoot all the time. No marriage for me. No sir!"

"But what will you do about love?" asked Douglas.

Judith's fine eyes went soft.

"Cherish it," she answered in a low voice. "Keep it forever. Never murder it by marriage."

"It can't be done," declared Douglas.

"Why not?"

"I don't know." He stirred uneasily. "It sounds all wrong to me. Just wait till you fall in love and see how you feel! You'll want to marry, just like all the rest of us."

"Never! I'm with Inez on that."

"Inez?"

"Yes, Inez. She's got more sense about living than all the women in this valley put together. And she knows life."

Douglas sighed.

"What are some of Inez's ideas about marriage?"

"Well, she just says it won't do. She says that the children have got to be taken care of, but that it isn't fair to put the curse of marriage on parents. And she says her way isn't the answer, either, but that anyhow it's honest, which is a darn sight more than a lot of marriages in Lost Chief."

Judith paused to take breath and Douglas asked,

"Say, now, listen, Jude; was Inez ever in love?"

"She says she's in love right now, but she won't say who he is."

"I don't believe she knows what love is. Her ideas aren't worth anything. I've lost faith in these folks that tell you they know life. They're exactly like the rest of us under their skins. I'm getting to believe that we all get happiness in the same way and over mighty few things. Loving and having children—that's about all."

"Inez says it's nothing of the kind, that the only way to be happy is to know what is beautiful when you see it."

"I suppose that's smart," said Douglas crossly, "but I haven't any idea what it means."

"I know what it means, but you never will till you can ride across Fire Mesa with your heart aching because it's so beautiful."

"And I suppose marriage isn't beautiful?" Douglas's voice was aggrieved.

"Do you see any beautiful marriages round here?" asked Judith.

Douglas stared at her tragically, then answered with a groan,

"No, I don't."

Neither spoke for a moment; then Douglas said,

"Were you ever in love, Judith?"

Judith looked at him with a curious expression in her eyes.

"I'm not sure," she answered slowly. "Not what Inez calls love—that's sure."

Peter suddenly appeared at the door.

"What do you kids think you're saying?" he shouted. "I couldn't help hearing while I sorted mail. What do you mean by thinking this way, Jude? Are you patterning your ideas on a woman like Inez?"

"I don't care what she is," replied Judith obstinately. "She is the only woman in Lost Chief who can talk anything but baby- and cattle-raising."

PETER took a turn or two up and down the room, then stopped before the bed.

"You both heard what I said about the lack of a church in Lost Chief. Look to yourselves if you want proof of the truth of what I said. If the Church don't form ideals for young things like you, loose women and men will."

"That may be true, Peter," said Douglas; "but I don't see why you should expect us to believe the stuff you can't believe yourself."

"I don't expect it. Jude, you put the water on to boil. When I finish with the mail, I'll dress that wound again." He went out, this time closing the door of the room behind him.

"I wonder who Peter really is?" said Judith in a low voice.

Douglas shook his head.

"Dad says he's seen better days."

"I wish I knew all about life that he does!" exclaimed the girl.

"I don't," grunted Douglas. Then he put out his hand to touch Judith's knee with infinite tenderness. "Couldn't you manage to fall in love with me, Judith? I'll stay your lover all my life."

Judith looked at Douglas with parted lips.

"Doug, I'm afraid!" she whispered.

They were staring at each other with wistful eyes when Peter's return ended the conversation.

DOUG'S wound healed quickly and with no complications. He remained with Peter for a week or so, then returned to his home. Scott Parson began preparations at once for carrying out Doug's sentence, and for a time the post-office and the west trail to Inez's place saw him most infrequently. The excitement over the shooting having abated, Lost Chief began preparations for the great event of the year, the Fourth-of-July rodeo.

All the world knows the story of a rodeo, knows the beauty and the daring of both riders and horses, knows the picturesque patois of the sand corral. But all the world does not know of Judith's performance at this particular rodeo.

Mary, lax and helpless enough on most matters concerning her daughter's conduct, held out on one point: Judith could not enter the Fourth-of-July rodeo until she was at least sixteen. But now, at sixteen, Judith asked permission of no one. She entered the exhibition with Buster and Sioux and Whoop-la, the bronco Scott had given her.

The rodeo was held on the plains to the east of the post-office. The Browns owned the great corral, strongly fenced, and with a smooth sandy floor bordered by a grand stand, weathered and unpainted, but still sturdy enough to withstand the swaying and stamping of the crowd. Neither the Browns nor any other of the Lost Chief families made money out of the exhibition. It was a community affair in which was felt an intense pride. All Lost Chief attended, of course, and people came in automobiles and in sheep wagons and in the saddle from the ranches for a radius of a hundred miles.

Burning heat and cloudless heavens, the high west wind and the nameless exhilaration and urge of the Rockies at seven thousand feet, this was the day of the rodeo. The exhibition began at ten in the morning and lasted all day, with an hour at noon for dinner.

There was the usual roping and throwing of steers and the usual riding of bucking broncos by men and women, young and old. Douglas rode, and rode well, but he had his peer in Jimmy Day and in Charleton. Judith rapidly eliminated all the women contestants and then began to vie with the men in the riding of buckers. By four o'clock, as one of the best four riders, bar none, she was ready to enter the last competition on the program. This was listed as an original exhibition to be given by each of the best four riders. Douglas, Jimmy and Charleton were the other contestants. Judith entered first.

She trotted into the sand corral on Buster, leading the blindfolded Sioux and followed at a short distance by Peter Knight, who was master of ceremonies for the day. A little murmur went through the grand stand. Judith's curls were bundled up under a sombrero. She wore a man's silk shirt with a soft collar. It was the color of the sky. Her khaki divided skirt came just below the knee, meeting a pair of high-heeled riding-boots. Her gauntleted gloves were deep-fringed. She rode slowly, silhouetted against the distant yellow of the plains. Sioux, a russet red, silken flanks gleaming in the sun, moved his head uneasily, but followed like a dog on leash.

Having crossed to the north end of the corral, Judith waited for Peter to come up on Yankee. Douglas, circling outside the fence uneasily, heard him say:

"You are a plumb fool, Judith! Anybody that plays round on foot with a bull isn't a cow-man. It's a life-and-death matter with a brute like Sioux, and you know it."

"You slip his blindfold off when I dismount," she said, and she trotted back to the south end of the enclosure. Here she dismounted, slipped the reins over Buster's head and turned to face the bull. Peter jerked the blindfold from the bull's eyes. The great creature lifted his head, and Peter backed away. Judith spread her arms wide and whistled. Sioux snorted, pawed the ground and started on a thundering gallop toward his mistress.

There was a startled murmur from the grand stand. Buster snorted and turned. Without moving, Judith gave a shrill whistle. Buster wheeled and came back to his first position, where he stood trembling. On came Sioux, his hoofs waking the echoes and with every apparent intention of goring his mistress. But ten feet from Judith he pulled up with a jerk, and with stiffened fore legs slid to her side and rubbed his great head against her shoulder. Judith threw her arm about his neck and hugged him, white teeth flashing at the grand stand, which rose to its feet and shouted.

JUDITH raised her hand for quiet, then leaped to Buster's saddle without touching the stirrups. She put the uneasy horse to a slow trot and gave a peculiar soft whistle to Sioux. Obediently he fell in behind the horse, and Judith gave her audience a unique exhibition of "follow your leader." Buster trotted, galloped and backed. Sioux imitated him without protest until Judith brought up before the grand stand with both animals kneeling on their fore legs, noses to the sand. Then Sioux jumped excitedly to his feet as again applause broke out. Judith took his lead-rope now and led him to the middle of the corral, where she blindfolded him and beckoned to Peter, who strode across the corral, carrying a saddle.

"Once more, Judith," he said, "I ask you not to do this."

"Saddle him quick, Peter; then get on Buster and ride him off when I'm up."

Peter adjusted the saddle as best he could to the bull's great girth while Judith rubbed the brute's forehead, talking to him softly. Sioux stood with head lowered, his red nostrils dilating and contracting rapidly. But he did not move. When Peter nodded, Judith jerked the blindfold free and leaped into the saddle. Sioux brought his mighty fore legs together and leaped into the air. Peter hesitated a fraction of a minute before putting his foot into Buster's stirrup. As the bull leaped, Buster reared and Peter fell, his left foot in the stirrup. The horse started at a gallop, dragging Peter toward the east gate.

Sioux, glimpsing from his wild, bloodshot eyes the prostrate figure of a man, gave a great bellow and charged. Judith brought her quirt down on the bull's flanks, at the same time whistling shrilly. But Sioux was now out on his own. He overtook Buster half-way down the corral and thrust a wicked horn at the wildly kicking Peter. Judith leaped from the saddle and, running before Sioux, seized his horns and threw herself across his face. The bull paused.

At this moment came the full blast of Sister's hunting-cry from the west gate. She crossed the corral like a hunted coyote and buried her fangs in Sioux's shoulder just as Douglas, on the Moose, caught Buster's bridle. Sioux cast Judith off as if she were a rag and gave his full attention to Sister. Judith picked herself up, rushed to the still plunging Buster and jerked Peter's foot from the stirrup. She ran to the blindfold lying in the sand a short distance away; then, whistling shrilly above Sioux's bellowing and Sister's yelping, she again caught one of the bull's horns in her slender brown hand. Sioux had rubbed Sister free against the fence and was now charging the dog as she snarled just under his dewlap.

Again and yet again he flung Judith against his shoulder, but she did not fall or lose her grip. Suddenly, so quickly that the grand stand could not follow the motion, she had wrapped the blindfold over the burning eyes. As the bull stopped, confused and trembling, she hobbled his fore legs to his head with the bridle-chain. Then she seized Sister's collar and stood panting, her hair tumbled about her neck. The grand stand shouted its delight. Peter had risen and was wiping the sand from his face.

"Call Sister, Peter!"cried Judith. "She'll bite me in a minute."

Peter mounted Yankee, whistled to Sister, and, with a rueful grin and shake of his head for the audience, trotted from the corral. Judith loosened the bridle-chain and jumped once more into Sioux's saddle.

"Pull off his blindfold, Doug!" she cried.

"Nothing doing," returned Douglas succinctly. "You get off that bull, Jude, before I take you off."

"I'm going to ride him up to the grand stand," said Judith between set teeth.

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She whistled to Sioux and he lunged forward. Doug twirled his lariat. It coiled round one of the bull's hind legs. Doug brought his horse to its haunches.

"You get off that bull, Judith," he said. "You've put up the real show of the day. Be satisfied before you are killed. Sioux is almost crazy."

Frank Day, who was one of the judges, now trotted up.

"Doug is right, Jude."

"There's not a bit of danger," cried Jude, "if you men would do what you're told to do! Peter had to stop to look instead of hurrying, as I told him."

Her eyes were full of tears. She dismounted slowly, and, after freeing Sioux from Doug's lariat, she led the uneasy bull before the grand stand and made her bow. Jimmy Day brought her a horse, and, mounting, she trotted out of the corral, followed by the half-frantic Sioux.

The three men contestants laughingly refused to put on their exhibitions. There was no hope, they agreed, of competing successfully against Sioux and Judith, so Judith received the prize, a twenty-dollar gold piece.

The day ended with this award. It was some time before Douglas and Judith freed themselves from the crowd. John and Mary, still laughing over Peter's discomfiture, led the postmaster off, that Mary might treat his really badly skinned face at the ranch. The ranchers who had come from distant valleys began to scatter toward the pass. When, at last, Judith and Douglas, with their string of horses and the still unchastened Sioux, started up the trail toward the post-office, they were held up by a stranger in an automobile.

"Listen, Miss Spencer!" he called. "How about you riding in the rodeo at Mountain City this fall?"

Doug and Judith both gasped. The rodeo at Mountain City was the ultimate and almost hopeless dream of every young rider.

"How do you know they'd let me in?" asked Judith.

"I'm chairman of the program committee this year," answered the stranger. "If you are interested, I'll write you details. I've got to run for it now."

"Interested!" exclaimed Judith. "I guess you know just what it means to be competing in the Mountain City rodeo!"

The stranger nodded.

"Then you'll hear from me." He turned his panting car away from the plunging horses and was a receding dot up the trail to the pass before Judith and Douglas had found their tongues.

"Well, you deserve it, Judith!" cried Douglas. "You beat anything I've seen. It's not only what you do but the way you do it. You've got to have a good outfit. I'll help you buy it."

"Do you really think I'm good enough for Mountain City?" exclaimed Judith.

"Good enough for the world!" declared Douglas.

Judith laughed and gave her attention to the unhappy Sioux.

PETER was at supper with John and Mary when they reached home. His whole face was covered with boric-acid powder. Judith and Douglas shouted with laughter. Peter buttered another biscuit.

"I never was vain of my looks," he said plaintively. "It was mean of you, Judith, to ruin what I had."

"I never was so surprised in my life—honestly—as when you fell, Peter!" cried Judith.

"Oh, yes; you were more surprised an hour ago," contradicted Douglas. He turned to his father. "Judith's been asked to ride at the Mountain City rodeo. The chairman of their program committee stopped us and asked her."

"Bully for the girl!" cried John. "I'm not surprised myself. Some show, Jude!"

"The Mountain City rodeo is a tough proposition for a young girl to tackle," said Peter.

"Oh, I'll go with her"—John spoke quickly—"and let Mary and Doug run the place for a week. We'll be back in time for the round-up."

"If Judith goes, I go," said Mary, with unwonted firmness.

"What do you think I am?" demanded John. "A millionaire or a Mormon?"

Douglas, a little white round the lips, glanced at Judith, who was calmly devouring the lavish piece of steak with which she had served herself. Peter was rolling a cigarette.

"If Jude goes," John went on, "she goes with her dad. And, believe me, I am going to buy her the doggonedest best outfit I can glom my hands on."

Peter caught Douglas's eye and almost imperceptibly shook his head.

"I'm going, too," repeated Mary.

"You are not!" John's voice thickened. "You and Douglas run the place. If there's a rancher in the state deserves a vacation more than I do, I wish you'd name him."

"Give me a match, John," said Peter; "and if there's no objection, let's get out of this hot kitchen."

JOHN tossed a match-box to the postmaster and led the way out to the corral. Peter and Douglas lined up on the fence beside him. Judith remained in the kitchen with her mother.

"Well, it was the best rodeo we ever had," said Peter.

"Jude was the whole show." John's handsome face showed vividly for a moment as he lighted his pipe. "I suppose there are other folks that ride as well, but she does it with an air."

"It's her love of it gets across to people who are watching her," mused Peter. "And she rides with a sort of ease that belongs to Jude and no one else, to say nothing of her power over animals. There is a lot to Jude. Too bad she lives in Lost Chief. She hasn't a chance in the world."

"Just how do you mean that?" demanded John.

"Exactly as I said it. She hasn't a chance in the world."

"Chance in the world for what?" John's voice was irritated. "Talk so a fool like me can understand you, Peter."

"I guess you understand me, John. Hello, Judith! I should think you'd be tired enough to go to bed."

"Who? Me?" Judith perched beside Peter. "I should say not! I'd like to go to a dance."

"I sure Gawd will try to give you your fill of dancing for once in Mountain City." The anger had disappeared from John's voice.

"Judith's not going unless her mother goes," said Douglas coolly.

Judith sniffed.

"Her master's voice again! You'd better horn out of this, Douglas."

"I haven't any intention of keeping out."

"You'd better," warned Judith. "If you think I'm going to turn down a chance for a real outfit without hearing the argument, you're mistaken."

"I told you I'd help you," insisted Doug.

"You! What could you buy?" gibed the girl.

"I was thinking, Jude," said John, "why don't you let me get you one of those regular riding-suits like Eastern women wear—pants and one of those long coats?"

"Everybody would laugh at me." Judith's voice was doubtful, but deeply interested. "What do you think, Peter?"

"Women's clothes are out of my line," replied Peter.

"Aw, don't bribe her, dad," protested Douglas.

"Bribe her!" snorted John. "For what?"

Peter gave a sardonic laugh that would have done credit to Charleton.

"I'm going home, John, before I get hauled in on a family row. Doug, I'm pretty stiff. Will you help me saddle Yankee?"

Douglas rose reluctantly and followed Peter into the shed, where Yankee was munching hay.

"Keep your fool mouth shut, Doug," whispered the postmaster. "You've got from now to September first to side-track this thing."

"If Jude passes her word to him, she'll go. And you know as well as I do, Peter, that most anybody would sell their soul to ride in that rodeo with a fine outfit."

"Certainly I know it. But you keep out of it for a while."

"Peter, I can't! When dad gets to working on Judith, I see red. Listen! Just listen!"

John's soft voice sounded through the apertures of the shed.

"You're beautiful, Judith! A beautiful woman! Let me dress you as you ought to be dressed, give you the right kind of a horse, and the whole of the rodeo will be yours. I tell you, girl, all you've got to do is to ask me for what you want."

"Do other folks call me beautiful, dad?" Judith's voice was breathless.

"Why do you call me 'dad'? I'm not your father, thank God!"

The outcome of Judith's wonderful invitation and matters of even greater importance to Lost Chief are related in the next instalment of "Godless Valley." See April EVERYBODY'S—out March 15th.

Dr. Goodrich Relates Another Adventure

The First Stone

In Which We Discover a Strange Analogy between a Supposed Murder and a Prize-Fight. How the Public May Sometimes Be Made to Accept the Delusions of a Diseased Mind

By Stoddard Goodhue

Illustration by J. M. Clement

WE HAD taken in (or been taken in by) the most widely exploited of "boxing-contests" over in New Jersey on that memorable second of July, and were now seated in Dr. Goodrich's automobile, bound for his country place in Connecticut.

"Well, what did you think of the fight?" I queried, hoping to start something.

"Fight? Did you say 'fight'?" the medical examiner countered—and I knew from his whimsical tone that my companion was in just the right mood.

"'Fight' was the word I ventured to use," I replied casually. "Do you object to it?"

"Object to the word 'fight'? Oh, not at all; not in the least! I object only to its misapplication. I presume you are referring to the cinema illustration of the art of lying on your side and playing possum that we—in common with ninety thousand other people—just witnessed. If so, I do object to the misuse of the word 'fight' in that connection."

To myself I chuckled, but I endeavored not to show my elation too openly.

"I take it, then," I said presently, appearing to speak meditatively, "that you do not feel that it was much of a contest. But how could you expect it to be a contest, considering the great difference in the size of the men? Doesn't the good big man always beat the good little man?"

"So I have heard it stated," admitted Goodrich, smiling quizzically. "But I am not quite sure that the rule fully explains why Dempsey, weighing one hundred and eighty-five pounds, beat the two-hundred-and-fifty pound Willard, or, going back, why Corbett, at one hundred and ninety, beat the two-hundred-and-twenty pound Sullivan, or why Corbett, in turn, was beaten by good old Fitz, weighing about one hundred and sixty. But waiving that, I didn't know that there was any question of a big and a little man involved in to-day's fiasco. I don't recall a heavyweight-championship contest in the past forty years——"

The narrator interrupted himself, and told off something on his fingers.

"Let us see," he reflected; "there was big Paddy Ryan and the much smaller Sullivan; then John L. against the relatively small Kilrain, and tiny Charlie Mitchell, whom he couldn't beat; and little Fitz and big Jeffries; and big Jack Johnson against little Tommy Burns and middle-sized Moran and middle-weight Stanley Ketchell and colossal Jess. Yes; I guess I'm right. There apparently hasn't been a heavyweight-championship fight in half a century—unless it was the Johnson-Jeffries match—in which the contestants were so evenly matched in height, reach and weight as these two were to-day. So I guess that, taken by itself, 'the good-big-man' idea won't pass muster. That doesn't explain the fiasco."

"What does explain it?" I questioned up.

Instead of answering directly, the physician hummed a little, smiled cryptically, and made this curious comment:

"It makes me think of an odd murder case that came my way a good many years ago, when I was practising medicine in a little town out in the Middle West."

"Does it, indeed?" I ventured. "Because Dempsey came so near to murdering Georges I suppose?"

The physician laughed heartily.

"Hardly that," he said. "If no one ever came any nearer to murder than that, we could close up our criminal courts and abolish the office of medical examiner. No; the association of ideas is a little more subtle."

"I might have known it," I agreed. "Too obvious analogies are not in your line, I am aware. This one is probably too subtle for my tired brain to follow. So please interpret your riddle."

"I'll spin the yarn, and let you make the application," he said. "Just at first you may not see the analogy, but perhaps you will find the story not without intrinsic interest."

"I haven't a doubt of it," I assured him. And that was the last comment I was called upon to make, for my companion was now under full spell of the reminiscent mood, and he told the story in characteristic fashion.

As a matter of course I didn't attend Estelle Mason's funeral. (Thus Goodrich launched abruptly into his subject.) The attending of funerals isn't much in a physician's line. We do what we can for the living—and leave the rest to our professional brothers of the cloth. But although, as I said, I did not attend the funeral, I wasn't left long in ignorance as to the unusual thing that had happened there. In point of fact, Stubby Loper, the constable, came directly to my office from the funeral, and came at top speed, as I could infer from his breathing.

"Didn't see you up at the Masons', Doc!" he blurted out, by way of introduction.

"Indeed! That's rather strange," I returned. "What did you see that excited you so?"

Stubby was up in arms in a jiffy.

"Who said I was excited?" he growled.

"You did; every move that you have repressed shows it," I told him. "Excitement is painted all over you." I had taken out my watch and held it up ostentatiously as I spoke. I pretended to count for a moment. "I can count the pulse in your neck from here, and it shows that your heart is running about a hundred and twenty. Your disguise is a poor veneer. Take it off. and let some of the excitement out and so lower your temperature. Fire away. What did you see?"

This sort of banter was so common a manner of exchange between Stubby and me that it carried no sting at all; so it was not what I said but the excitement that he felt that made Stubby's round red face get still redder as he gurgled:

"All right, Doc. You score, as usual. But I didn't see anything in particular. It was what I heard that set me thinking."

"Thinking is a dangerous habit, Stubby," I urged, still baiting him. "But perhaps it won't do any harm if you don't let it become chronic. What did you think you heard?"

"I didn't *think* I heard anything. I know what I heard."

"Ah, but I thought you said you were thinking," I corrected. Stubby was such an amusing chap when he tried to be serious that one couldn't help taking advantage of a chance like that.

"I am thinking," he sputtered. "I am thinking about what I heard. And I am thinking darned hard, too. Stop your joshing, Doc, and let us get down to brass tacks. I heard some things up there."

"Who said them?" I challenged.

"The preacher, in the course of the funeral sermon. It was some of the queerest stuff you ever heard. I didn't pay any attention to it at first. Funeral sermons are supposed to be pretty much of one pattern, and I was thinking about something else—just remembering what a nice girl Estelle had been, and what tough luck it was that she had to die when a lot of harum-scarum girls about town that I could mention could have been spared much better—when all of a sudden it came home to me that the preacher was saying something funny."

I pretended to misunderstand.

"Something funny? I never took the Reverend Burton to be much of a humorist," I suggested; "and even if he were, I shouldn't have expected him to crack jokes at a funeral. What was this one?"

Stubby was getting desperate.

"Oh, well, Doc; you know I don't mean it like that!" he shouted. "What I meant was that he was saying something that sounded darned queer. It was so blamed funny a thing that it sort of jarred you out of your sleep, like a wrong note from a cornet when the band is playing. I looked round and saw that everybody else was sitting up and taking notice, too. And the longer he talked the funnier it got—the queerer, I mean. When he got through, I hiked right down here to find out what you think about it. The fellow spoke as if he knew what he was talking about. You couldn't believe he'd pull a bone like that unless he was sure of his facts."

BY THIS time I had had my fun with the little fellow, and given him time to get his breath; so I stopped baiting him and suggested that he get down to brass tacks and let me hear what the Reverend Burton had said that was so exciting.

Stubby's story, as he then told it, was to the effect that he hadn't noticed much that the preacher said at first, until suddenly he shouted, "'Let him that is without sin cast the first stone!'"

"That sure did seem a funny thing to quote when you're talking about a nice little girl like Estelle Mason," said Stubby. "And he went on with a whole lot more stuff along the same lines. I can't repeat just what he said; but I remember that there was stuff about 'sins of the flesh,' and 'the mark of Cain,' and 'the fang of the serpent.' And there was something about being struck down in the bloom of youth by a desecrating hand; and once he looked right at me as he said that, by God's providence, and with the aid of the authorities of the law, murder, even if 'adroitly conceived'—I remember that phrase—murder will out. Now, wasn't that queer stuff?"

"It does sound rather queer—the way you tell it," I admitted.

"Well, I'm telling it just the way it happened," Stubby averred, all earnestness. "Of course, I can't give the fancy twists of language that the preacher used," he admitted apologetically. "But the point is that, before he got through, he made it plain that he thought there was something mighty queer about Estelle Mason's death, and he gave you the impression that he knew a lot more than he was telling. Now, what I want to know is what are the facts of the case? If there is anything wrong, it's up to me to do something about it. What do you think? I know Estelle died suddenly and every one said it was heart-disease. I suppose the case was reported to you as coroner?"

I told him that I had such a report, made out by Dr. Bascom, the attending physician, and corroborated by Dr. Johnson, who was also there soon after Estelle died, or, at any rate, soon after they found out that she was dead. I told him further that the two doctors agreed as to the cause of death, and that apparently they regarded the death as perfectly natural. Estelle had not been well for some time, and Bascom had been looking after her. The report here stated that he had prescribed for her the day before her death.

"Sure he had, Doc! And that is one of the things I want to talk to you about," said Stubby. He fumbled in his vest pocket and brought out presently an ordinary pill-box which, as he opened it, revealed several capsules. "This is what he prescribed—or what is left of it. It appears that there were twelve capsules, and nine of them are left."

I examined the capsules, and Stubby went on to explain that there had been a lot of excitement up at the house over what the preacher said, and that Estelle's aunt, Sarah Jackson, who didn't go to the cemetery with the rest of them, had told him about the capsules and got them for him.

"I don't need to tell you that she is a suspicious old cat," said Stubby; "and she sure has her fur all rumpled up now. She says that Mr. Burton would never have talked like that unless he knew that Estelle was murdered, and the preacher's say-so goes with her every time."

"Hm. I seem to sense a pretty scandal brewing," I meditated. "Aunt Sarah will be in her element. Whom does she name as the murderer?"

"She isn't quite sure—or wasn't when I left her ten minutes ago." Stubby was grinning now—getting back to normal. "You see, she had had only a few minutes to think about it. The thing had been sprung so unexpectedly. But she intimated that, in her opinion, the choice of suspects lay between Frank Haywood and Dr. Bascom."

I asked whether the good woman had explained just how she Sherlocked that particular pair.

"I naturally asked her that," said Stubby, "mentioning that they were regarded as two of the nicest young men in town, and that they were both supposed to be rather especially good friends of Estelle's."

"Well, what then?"

"She said that was partly what made her suspicious, now that she knew something was wrong; but that also she couldn't see who else could have done it, for Estelle must have been poisoned, and Dr. Bascom wrote the prescription and Frank put it up at the drug store.

"I asked her whether she supposed the doctor would have written a prescription openly calling for poison, and whether Frank would have put up such a prescription if he had, even if one or the other or both of them had wanted to injure a girl that they were supposed to be fond of."

"Doubtless she had an appropriate answer for that," I prompted.

"Sure she did, Doc! She said that no doubt the prescription was all right on its face; but that Dr. Bascom's office is right over the drug store, and she has seen him back of the prescription counter lots of times, and he might easily have slipped in and put something in one of the capsules, if he was the guilty one; and that if it was Frank who did it, he, of course, could have put anything he pleased in the capsules, no matter what was in the prescription."

I WAS beginning to get a line on the situation as I listened with interest while Stubby, now in his best vein, related that he had humored the old lady by admitting that such a thing was conceivable, however unlikely, and had asked her whether Estelle went after the prescription herself or how she got the capsules. He was told that Estelle had been practising with the choir at the church the night before, and that the preacher happened to be in the drug store and that he himself took the capsules to her, so they couldn't have been tampered with.

Then the constable laughed outright as he related that he had ventured to suggest that the preacher might have done the tampering.

"I told her that seemed to me as likely as her theory," he said. "And then she got huffy and asked if I considered it part of my official duty to shield criminals, and I thought it was a pretty good time to leave and hoof it down here. Now, what do you think about it, Doc?" he concluded. "What Burton said sure will stir things up, and I've got to know the answer."

As a matter of course, I had been doing a little thinking while Stubby talked. A properly authenticated statement as to the cause of Estelle Mason's death having come to me, I had taken it for granted that she had died from heart-disease, and probably would not have given the matter further thought. Various of the Masons had been patients of mine at one time or another, like nearly every one else in Stacen City, but none of them had consulted me professionally since a time five or six years before when, during my absence from town, young Dr. Bascom had been called in to attend Estelle's sister Emma. There had chanced to be no serious illness in the family since then, and for advice about small ailments all of them, I think, had gone to Dr. Bascom.

I recalled Estelle had a severe attack of scarlet fever when she was about ten years old. I mentioned this now to Stubby Loper, by way of answering his question, pointing out that scarlet fever often leaves the patient with some severe impairment, and that it was easily within the possibilities that Estelle's heart had been involved.

"She could dance all night long, Doc; and she was a bird of a tennis-player," Stubby objected.

"That doesn't prove anything," I told him. Then I gave him a rather technical explanation, partly by way of camouflage, to the effect that overexertion tends to dilate the heart, if there chances to be a leaky valve, that, for a time, what we call "compensation" would take place, and then the heart might become so weakened that sudden exertion or excitement might paralyze it. Quite possibly that was what had occured in Estelle's case. Of course she was very young—the report said nineteen years and seven months—but the same thing has happened to lots of others no older than that. I suggested that we had better defer official action until we had something more tangible than innuendos to go by. I assured him, however, that I would look round a bit, and make a few inquiries.

"Suppose you do the same," I said, "and then come and see me to-morrow. Meantime, let us both do a good deal of listening and not much talking."

"Trust me for that, Doc," said Stubby. "But you can just bet that every one else in town will be talking. I think the whole thing is phony; but I don't want to be fooled again the way I was in the Watson case. So put on your thinking-cap and let us get right down to brass tacks in the matter."

That sort of admonition was characteristic. Stubby always counted on some one else to put on the thinking-cap. His forte was action.

IF MEMORY serves me, it was the following afternoon that I received a visit from the Reverend Mr. Richard Burton himself. The minister and I were casual acquaintances, of course—for every one knows every one else in a town the size of Stacen City. But, to the best of my recollection, he had never before been in my office.

I noticed that Mr. Burton's fine, scholarly, rather ascetic face was unusually careworn. The color did not show through the skin quite as one likes to see it. Observing, perhaps, that I was scrutinizing him rather closely, the minister hastened to assure me that he was perfectly well and had not come to consult me in an ordinary professional capacity.

"In point of fact," he said rather abruptly, "I have come about a matter much more important than anything that directly concerns my health. Most unfortunate and tragic circumstances have come to my attention, and I have chosen to speak to you about them, partly because they fall within your official cognizance as coroner, and partly because of my confidence in you personally and my respect for your well-recognized position in the community."

I acknowledged the compliment with a gesture and awaited developments. After a moment's pause, the minister began to tell the story I was expecting.

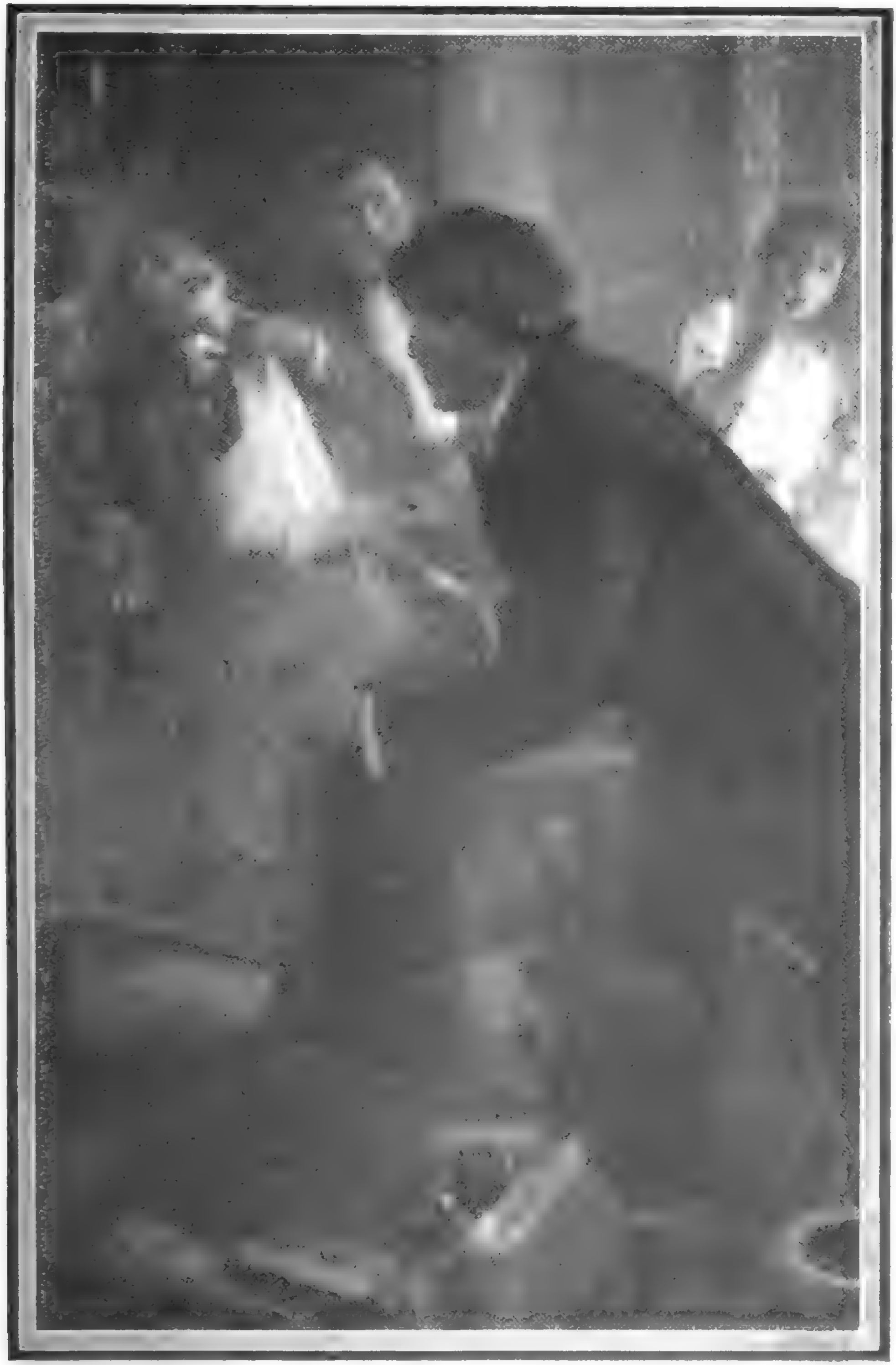
"Let me come directly to the point," he said. "The tragedy to which I refer is the death of a beautiful young girl well known to you—my former parishioner, Estelle Mason. In conducting the funeral services yesterday, I took occasion to drop a few hints for the benefit of certain authorities who were present, and I should have preferred to take no further active hand in the matter had it not come to my attention that it has been suggested that I myself might conceivably have had a share in the tragedy. It is true that the suggestion was probably made half jestingly, or altogether jestingly; but this is not a matter in which one can allow even a jest to go unanswered. It is hardly necessary to say that I had no foreknowledge of the tragedy that impended, but it is necessary to explain precisely my connection with the affair, and in so doing I shall divulge certains facts that hitherto I have hesitated to mention. The first circumstance to which I refer is that I unwittingly conveyed the fatal capsules to Estelle a few hours before her death. I chanced to be in the drug store——"

"Yes; I happen to know about that," I interrupted. "I know that you took some capsules to the church, where Estelle was practising with the choir, and that you gave the box to her. Needless to say, I have not the remotest idea that you tampered with the contents of the box in any way. But what conceivable reason have you for harboring the idea that makes you refer to these as 'fatal capsules'?"

"I regret very much to say that I have the very best of reasons," he asserted earnestly. Again he paused and eyed me with a look between doubt and suspicion. His voice was lowered as he went on to say that some of the reasons he did not care to divulge at the moment, but that there were two matters of direct evidence that he felt it his duty to reveal.

"In the first place," he declared, "I chanced to overhear a remark made by Estelle Mason to her sister Emma, who is also a member of the choir, as the two were passing out of the church when rehearsal was finished, a few minutes after I had given Estelle the capsules. The remark was absolutely unequivocal, and, I deeply regret to say, left not a shadow of doubt—not the possibility of a shadow—as to the condition which the medicine was destined to remedy. I was too profoundly shocked at the moment to say anything, but the revelation drove every other thought from my mind, and I may tell you that I had not retired but was sitting at my desk, giving the subject careful consideration, when the telephone summoned me to come to the home of Mrs. Mason to give her such consolation as I could in her hour of bereavement."

"You were expecting the tragedy, then?" I inquired.



An instant later the weapon spoke, and Dr. Bascom, who had sprung up, pitched forward on his face.

"Not at all," he assured me, with great emphasis. "Understanding what I had seen and heard, I did not at first associate Estelle's sudden death with the medicine I had inadvertently brought her. I accepted the statement made to me that heart-failure had been the cause. It occurred to me, I recall, that the deep distress which presumably had eventuated in collapse had doubtless been accompanied by profound penitence, and I trust it was not an impious thought that perhaps this had been the most merciful solution of a tragic situation."

I PRETENDED not to pay attention to the man, but was really watching him pretty closely out of the corner of my eye as I asked him how he had come to regard the matter in another light.

"Through a chance observation—or perhaps a providential interposition—that fully opened my eyes," he asserted. He went on to explain that he had always had almost preternaturally acute hearing, which he had found sometimes an advantage and perhaps more frequently a disadvantage. "In this case," he said, "it would have been far better for my peace of mind if I had not overheard, in the first instance, the conversation between Estelle and her sister, and then the answer Dr. Bascom gave to a question asked him pointedly by Dr. Johnson as the two were standing alone by the bedside of the dead girl as I passed along the hall on the way to the room where the other members of the family were gathered."

As the preacher paused at this point, and seemed again in doubt about going on, I naturally asked if he did not think it best to tell just what Dr. Bascom's remark had been?

"I can give you his exact words," he said finally, "for they made an indelible impression on my mind. The words were: 'I gave it to her because I felt justified in doing so under the circumstances.' Dr. Johnson interrupted with: 'Justified! Good God, man, what are you saying?' And Bascom, interrupting in turn, blurted out, 'Of course I did not expect a result like this.' Johnson moved away from him with an expression of horror. 'What other result could you expect?' he said.

"I had no thought or intention of overhearing what they were saying, but when I did inadvertently overhear, I was too astounded for movement, or even speech. Then the men saw me and were covered with obvious confusion, and Dr. Bascom leaned over the body and professed to be examining the eyes, while Johnson turned toward me and said: 'A very sad case, Mr. Burton. Estelle has died suddenly of heart-disease. It will be a great consolation to the family to have you with them.'

"I passed on without saying a word; but you can well imagine my feelings."

The minister was speaking now with animation, and apparently without reserve. I watched him intently as I asked whether he thought that Dr. Johnson and Dr. Bascom knew that he had heard them.

"I am sure they did not," he answered promptly. "They were speaking in very low tones, and I am confident that an ordinary ear would not have made out anything but inarticulate murmur of voices. But the fact that I did hear places upon me the burden of responsibility that I would gladly have escaped. I felt it my duty to shape the funeral discourse, and, in particular, to offer prayer yesterday to meet the terrible situation. Possibly I should have done nothing more in the matter but for the innuendos growing out of my unfortunate association with the transfer of the fatal capsules."

"I presume you refer," I said, "to what Stubby Loper said to Miss Jackson, Mrs. Mason's sister?"

"Precisely that—and to the fact that similar remarks have been made to several other people, as I have been informed."

Still watching the face of my visitor closely, without looking directly at him, I assured him that I could not believe that Loper had repeated the remark to any one but me, saying that I had especially enjoined him to silence in the matter.

"He has not heeded your injunction," Mr. Burton declared. "I have positive evidence from three different persons to whom he spoke that he is endeavoring to spread broadcast the idea that I had guilty foreknowledge of the purpose for which the capsules were given the unfortunate girl, and that I was a willing and therefore a guilty messenger. That is why I have come to you."

The minister was now touching on a

topic that I found particularly interesting. But I endeavored not to seem too eager as I asked if he cared to give the names of his informants.

Once more a look of suspicion came into his eyes as he declared that he preferred not to name them at the moment, adding, however, that they were persons whose testimony could not be doubted.

"Moreover," he went on, "the fact that these people know of the circumstances is in itself conclusive. They are people who by no chance could have known the Masons; and Frank Haywood assures me that he has told no one that he delivered the capsules to me. There is no other source from which they could obtain their information. So, by a process of exclusion, you have ample proof of the truth of their assertions that they were repeating what Loper had told them."

We were both silent for a few moments, and then I said,

"Is there any reason you know of why Loper should wish to injure you?"

The response was hesitant, but emphatic.

"There is no valid reason. But I have had evidence before that he is antagonistic to me. Moreover, it appears that he is anxious to shield Bascom. Of that, also, I have proof. That is an additional reason why I have come to you."

"Are you friendly with Dr. Bascom?" I asked pointedly, adding, "I understand that both of you have paid rather marked attention to the Mason girls."

"He is a man I never cared for," said the clergyman guardedly; "but I did not suspect the depths of his depravity until now. That, however, is neither here nor there. What do you advise me to do?"

I thought the matter over for a few moments and then watched the minister very carefully as I said:

"If you feel certain that a crime has been committed, the obvious thing to do is to call the matter to the attention of the prosecuting attorney. Harrison is a member of your own congregation. If he feels that the evidence warrants action, he will order a coroner's investigation, and that will bring the matter before me officially."

Now Mr. Burton's eyes were averted.

"Mr. Harrison is indeed a member of my congregation, but our relations are not very cordial," he murmured presently.

"That will make no difference when a question of justice is involved," I assured him. "Tell Mr. Harrison what you know, and he will decide what is to be done. I cannot take action against a fellow physician without official authorization. When I receive such authorization, I will make an investigation, as coroner, designed to get at all the facts."

The minister looked up quickly.

"But I have already told you the facts," he declared.

"You have told me what you have heard," I said. "But our conference has been entirely unofficial. What I have learned in this private interview I shall treat with professional secrecy. What I do as coroner, if called on to act, will, of course, be done publicly. I would urge you to be very sure of your facts before bringing publicity upon innocent people. Beyond that, I can offer you no advice."

As my visitor rose to go, his manner, it seemed to me, was somewhat less cordial than when he entered. If he felt dissatisfied, however, with my attitude, there was nothing in his parting words to indicate it.

"The facts are clear enough," he said. "What one sees with one's own eyes and hears with one's own ears cannot well be doubted. But the path of duty is not always quite clear. Estelle is in the presence of her Maker, and no act of yours or mine can change her destiny. And the man who was responsible for her undoing probably did not wilfully cause her death. His act was criminal, but the direct brand of Cain is not on his forehead. I do not know that there is any legal difference, but there is a moral difference. My concern, naturally, is with the moral rather than with the legal aspects of the tragedy. I will take the matter under prayerful consideration."

"Do so," I answered, by way of final admonition.

A FEW minutes after Mr. Burton left my office, Stubby Loper entered. I wasted no time in formalities.

"Stubby," I said, "I hear that you have been talking a lot, and practically accusing the minister of complicity in the death of Estelle Mason."

For reply, Stubby merely looked at me in open-eyed astonishment. He apparently thought that I must be joking. When he finally found his tongue, he said:

"Gee, Doc, I thought for a minute you meant it! For the love of Mike, stop joking! You remember I told you I wouldn't talk, and you know me well enough to know that I haven't said a word. But the whole town is excited over the rumors, and it's up to us to do something."

"All right," I answered. "You have told me all I wanted to know. Now, get busy and ask Emma Mason and Dr. Bascom and Dr. Johnson and Mr. Burton to come to this office at seven o'clock this evening. Tell them this as coming from me unofficially, but say that it is important; and if any one is disinclined to come, make it a summons from the coroner. You may ask Frank Haywood to come, too, and bring along the prescription that he filled for Estelle Mason the other evening. I want you to be here, and it will do no harm for Harrison to come as well; but I will call him up and speak to him about it myself."

"All right, Doc," said Stubby, moving toward the door. "I will round them up, and I will be here on the minute myself. I haven't any notion what you're going to do, but I leave it to you."

Stubby looked immensely relieved when he started on his mission.

WITHIN ten or fifteen minutes after the hour, the people I had summoned appeared in my office. Stubby found chairs for every one. Mr. Harrison sat at my side; the others ranged themselves along the walls close together, for the room was small. I told Mr. Harrison, loud enough for every one to hear, that I had requested him to be present because the investigation involved matters that might fall within his cognizance as prosecuting attorney. Then I told them that, although the occasion was informal, everybody testifying would be put under oath, so that our investigation might have the official status of a coroner's inquest.

I first administered the oath to Emma Mason and asked her to take the chair on the other side of Mr. Harrison.

"I wish to ask you only one or two questions," I said. "Last Thursday evening, as you were leaving the choir-meeting with your sister Estelle, did you have any conversation whatever with her referring to her health or condition?"

The answer came instantly.

"She said she had a headache and was going to take one of the capsules that Dr. Bascom had sent her. And I said that I had a headache and would take one of the capsules also. Then each of us took a capsule just before we left the church."

I asked if anything else had been said about Estelle's health, and the girl replied as promptly as before,

"Nothing at all." She shook her head for greater emphasis. "We met Mabel Richards just outside the church, and we all walked home together. We were planning some charades for a party Mabel was to give the next week, and in the excitement I forgot all about my headache, and I guess Estelle forgot hers, too. Earlier in the evening, though, when we were going down to the church, we hurried a little, as we were late, and Estelle said she had a pain in her side. She often did if she hurried or was excited. But nothing more was said about it that night."

"Was your sister worried about her health or her physical condition?" I put the question slowly and with emphasis on the concluding words.

The girl turned toward me with obvious surprise.

"Not in the least," she assured me. "Estelle was never happier or seemingly in better health than on Wednesday afternoon when we were playing tennis with Dr. Bascom. But both Estelle and I have been subject to headaches, and we asked Dr. Bascom to give us a prescription. He wrote one for us, more in jest, I think, than because he thought we needed anything, and I took it to the drug store the next day. It was the prescription for the capsules that I mentioned, of which we each took one as we were leaving the church. Mr. Burton had brought the capsules from the drugstore."

I asked the witness if she knew whether Estelle had taken any more of the capsules. Again her answer was at once ready and explicit. She was positive that her sister had not taken another capsule—had not even seen the box again.

"After we got home," she explained, "Estelle said she was feeling all right. Then I put the box with the remaining capsules in the medicine-cabinet, and it was not touched until the next day, when I took another capsule, because I had a headache again. I did not see the box after that, but auntie told me that she had given it to Mr. Loper."

AS THE girl gave this testimony, I glanced from time to time at Mr. Burton. His face was placid, and he seemed to look straight ahead, as if absorbed in thought. As far as any one could judge, he barely listened to the girl's words. At all events, he seemed quite unmoved by them.

The same imperturbability marked his demeanor during the brief period when the other witnesses were testifying. This testimony need not be detailed, except as to two points. First, the earnest assertion of Stubby Loper that he had made no reference to the case whatsoever in conversation with any one but me. The testimony as to securing the box containing the nine capsules and the circumstances associated with the incident constituted merely a repetition of what he had told me.

The other item of evidence concerned the testimony of Dr. Johnson. I showed him the prescription that Dr. Bascom had written for the capsules, one of which had been taken by Estelle and two by her sister Emma, and asked him whether it called for anything harmful or anything that could have caused the death of Estelle.

His reply was an emphatic negative.

I then asked him whether he had made any comments to Dr. Bascom, or whether Dr. Bascom had said anything to him that would imply that the medicine prescribed by Dr. Bascom might have caused the girl's collapse.

Again his reply was an emphatic negative, and it seemed obvious that he was astonished that such a question should be asked.

At no time had there been the slightest question in his mind as to the cause of the girl's death, he declared. He was well aware that she had a dilated heart, as he had examined her repeatedly. Again and again he had cautioned her against overexertion, and had also urged her sister and her mother to keep her from becoming unduly excited or being subjected to exceptional strain. He had urged her not to indulge in such active exercise as dancing or playing tennis.

"But I need not tell you," he added, "that a young girl does not readily accept such admonitions. Estelle had not only played several games of tennis that afternoon but Miss Emma tells me that she ran a foot-race with Mabel Richards on the way home from the choir-meeting that night."

He went on to say that Dr. Bascom and he were told of this, and were agreed that such overexertion, combined with the excitement and physical exertion incident to practising some charades after the girls reached the house, had been the immediate cause of heart-failure.

I questioned the doctor explicitly as to whether anything had been said by him or by Dr. Bascom as to medicine having been prescribed for Estelle—the prescription that he had in his hand, or any other.

"Nothing whatever," he declared emphatically. He added that he did not know that Estelle had taken any medicine, and was sure that Dr. Bascom did not know it. "I reached the bedside before Dr. Bascom did," he explained, "and I heard everything that was said to him after he had arrived. I am sure that at the moment he had forgotten all about the prescription, and I am equally sure that it was of no importance whether he had or not, as these harmless drugs had nothing whatever to do with Estelle's death."

"Thank you, Doctor," I said. "I agree with you perfectly."

Then I turned to the minister.

"Mr. Burton," I said, "I have brought these friends of ours here without having previously seen or consulted them in any way since I talked with you, in order that I might convince you that you are laboring under a grave misapprehension as to the death of Estelle Mason. I was convinced of this when you talked to me this afternoon. I realized that you were telling me what you believed to be the exact truth; but I was confident that you had not really heard what you thought you had heard, and that your inferences were utterly wrong, because they were based on false impressions.

"I wish now to ask you if you are not now yourself convinced as to this. Is it not now obvious to you that you heard no such things as you thought you heard, and which you recited to me as the conversation of Emma Mason, Dr. Johnson or of the various people whom you believed to be quoting Mr. Loper when you chanced to overhear their remarks on the street?"

I paused for a moment, but as the minister showed no intention to reply, I continued more emphatically.

"Putting the matter quite frankly and baldly, your ears deceived you. Sounds that you heard were misinterpreted. The conceptions you formed were illusions, and the conclusions you drew from them constituted a delusion. I have demonstrated this before this group of interested persons, or, rather, I have permitted them to demonstrate it, because it is obviously desirable that the false rumors that found their origin in what you said at the funeral should immediately be contradicted. Your delusional concept must not be allowed to poison the minds of this community—to do a gross injustice to the memory of a blameless girl who is dead and to the reputation of a blameless physician who is living. I must ask you, in the presence of these witnesses, to acknowledge that you were absolutely mistaken. If you cannot or will not do so, I must pronounce you the victim of a delusion that no sane mind could harbor."

AS I finished speaking, the minister slowly rose and stretched to his full height, his arms folded and his head thrown back. His face was absolutely immobile, but there was a strange light in his eyes. He was pale as death. For a few moments he stood there regarding me with a look which seemed to mingle defiance with contempt. When he did speak, his voice was high-pitched, and his words were:

" 'Father, forgive them; they know not what they do!' "

Again a pause, and now his head was bowed, and when he spoke, in a low tone, he seemed to be soliloquizing.

"They have conspired against me," he murmured, "even as they conspired against me in the days of Pontius Pilate. Once more they would crucify me if they could. I have denounced their sins, exposed their iniquity. They would shield this seducer—this murderer—because they themselves are no less sinful. But this son of Cain shall not escape. This woman was betrothed to me. I had chosen her, even though the choice had not been revealed to her. It is written that he who traduces a betrothed woman must pay the utmost penalty. It is written also, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.' It is so written, and so it shall be enacted. The virgin that this follower of Beelzebub traduced and slaughtered was a member of my flock. By my hand the crime shall be avenged."

For such words as these I was not altogether unprepared, for I knew the working of the paranoic mind. But the others listened to the words absolutely dumfounded, hardly comprehending their meaning, for until that moment no one had ever believed or suspected that Richard Burton was other than of perfectly sound and normal mentality. To me, as I said, the words were not altogether strange, but even I was not prepared for the sequel.

As the minister ceased speaking, his entire aspect underwent a change. Of a sudden, his face flushed; he assumed a crouching attitude, as if about to spring forward to an attack. His right hand was swiftly extended and, to my horror, I saw that it held a revolver. An instant later the weapon spoke, and Dr. Bascom, who had sprung up, pitched forward on his face.

Almost as he pulled the trigger, the maniac had leaped backward to the far corner of the room and stood there, waving the revolver in our faces as he shouted:

"Stand back! Stand back! Vengeance is mine! I have avenged!"

Then I saw that his face again was ghastly white. Eyes that before had been mere slits were now staring wide. At that moment, apparently, a realization of what he had done came home to him, and the shock for the instant normalized his perverted mind. In that second of rationality, overcome with a normal realization of what he had done, he turned the revolver suddenly against his own side, and again its vicious snap was heard. The next moment, the form of Mr. Burton collapsed, and his body settled back into the corner where he had stood, with wide-open but unseeing eyes staring out at us.

As I turned, I saw that Dr. Johnson was leaning over the prone figure of Bascom, listening to his heart, and that Emma Mason was supporting his head and leaning her face close to his as she caressed his cheek. I saw that his eyes were open, but not sightless. As I came toward him, he was murmuring:

"I'm all right. It's nothing."

Examination showed that his estimate was too optimistic. Dr. Bascom was badly hurt, but not fatally. The bullet had struck his arm as he was reaching toward his assailant, and, shattering the bone of the forearm, had been deflected so that it cut through the neck, just safely away from the jugular.

"You are a little bit mussed up," I commented. "But you are mighty lucky to get off so easily. Not every one who incurs the enmity of a paranoic fares so well. A little good doctoring will bring you through in short order."

"Fair doctoring and good nursing will do the trick," corrected Dr. Johnson; "and I think we can all guess who will do the nursing."

AS GOODRICH finished speaking, the chauffeur brought the car to a stop.

"Ah, here we are!" he commented. "I had not noticed where we were, I was so busy gossiping."

"And I so busy listening," I replied. "Your near-murder story is all right. But I confess that I don't see what it has to do with the fight back there in Jersey City."

"The *alleged* fight, you mean."

"All right. Alleged fight, if you insist."

"I must insist, because that is the point of application of my story," said the physician. "It was an alleged fight that we saw, and my story is about an alleged murder. There wasn't a real fight, and there wasn't a real murder. All the hubbub about one and the other was merely a matter of public gossip. The gossip in one case was confined to a little town; in the other it started in a big city and spread all over the world. But the principle is the same."

"It seems a bit far-fetched," I ventured; "but I begin to see the point."

"A lot of people never will see it," replied the physician, now speaking seriously. "In the case of Estelle Mason, a lot of people think to this day that there was a murder. And a proportionate lot of people will never discover that they did not see a fight this afternoon. All of which illustrates the power of that wonderful old lady, Dame Rumor."

"I begin to get your full meaning," I commented.

"The more you think about it the more clearly you will see it," said the physician, still speaking earnestly. He reflected a little, then went on: "The point of the matter, if I have made myself clear, is that the paranoic reaches false conclusions because he starts with false premises. He hears voices that appear to tell him things from which certain logical deductions may be drawn. The trouble is that he mistakes hallucinations for realities. The words he thinks he hears are not actual words spoken by any one, but his own misinterpretation of words that were very different, or of sounds that were not words at all. Thus his seemingly logical deductions are utterly mistaken, and become the basis of delusional fixed ideas."

Another pause. And then came the application.

"If you recall that this Frenchman—whom ninety thousand of us paid a million and a half dollars or so to see—had never even met in the ring a heavyweight of real class, and that he had been beaten decisively by two or three superannuated American middleweights (Klauss and Papke, for example)—that, in short, there was no reason whatever to suppose that he possessed any qualification of a top-notch fighter except nerve, you will see that the premises on which his manager developed the delusion that he was a fighter, and then imposed it on the American public, were strictly comparable in reliability to those that led the Reverend Mr. Burton of my story to think that a murder had been committed. The analogy may not be perfect, but it will pass."

"But wait a minute!" I said, having a sudden inspiration. "What about the two-hundred-thousand-dollar purse that the Frenchman was assured—win, draw or play 'possum'?"

Dr. Goodrich turned toward me with well-simulated surprise.

"Ah, there indeed the analogy fails to hold," he said reflectively. "Yes; you're right—there the analogy quite disappears, does it not? I rather hoped you would overlook that point." The smile broadened, the eyes were twinkling as he added, "Still, I told you that the analogy was not quite perfect, you remember."

The next story of this series will be "The Accusing Voice," in which Dr. Goodrich, using a marvelous new scientific device, releases an innocent man from a web of the most damaging circumstantial evidence. In April EVERYBODY'S—out March 15th.

The King's Son

From Orphanage and Kennel the Author Picks an Odd, Lovable Pair That Do Their Bit Nobly in Making a Story That You Will Like if Your Emotions Are Not Petrified—and of Course They Aren't

By Mildred Fitz-Hugh

IT IS a common saying that kennel-dogs lack individuality. If this is so, it is the fault of the system rather than the animal. Retired Grand Champion Faraway Terrence, the king of Irish terriers, and Johnny Doone, formerly of Bleak Ridge Orphanage, now a humble attendant to the King, were both products of systems—systems which differ widely in purpose, though they sometimes produce similar results.

Outwardly it would have been hard to trace a resemblance between the King and Johnny Doone, for the Grand Champion, though old and rheumatic, was as regal in his bearing as the proudest monarch in Europe, while the kennel-boy slunk about his chores with the apologetic manner of one who doubts his right to existence.

All the dogs loved Johnny; but before Mr. Slade, their owner, or Henning, the manager, the boy maintained a pose of utter indifference to their advances. When Henning brought out the dogs for the inspection of visitors, Johnny remained in the background with slouched shoulders and lowered eyes, his big hands crammed into ragged pockets. When the younger dogs, seeing their friend, would strain toward him on their leashes, he ignored them completely. A certain rhythmic motion of the lower jaw was the only relaxation he allowed himself in public.

With both Johnny and the King it was not so much that they lacked emotions as that they had been schooled to hide them. An orphanage and a kennel have this in common: neither encourages a display of temperament. Perhaps this long subservience to systems was what gave the retired Champion and his attendant their chief bond in common—a stoical acceptance of fate.

On lazy summer afternoons, when the King sunned himself in the largest fenced-in runway, the one that was large enough almost to make you forget it was a runway and not an open field, Johnny would stretch his angular limbs alongside the dogs in the tall grass that formed a scented bed for their bodies. Unanimously they always chose the far corner of the run that looked out upon a glory of wild meadow and wooded hill. A brook threaded the hill's base, and on still afternoons Johnny and the King could hear its bubbling laugh as it slapped the stones along its rough course. The two would lie motionless for minutes at a time, the King's head resting upon crossed paws, the boy's chin cupped in grimy fingers, two pairs of brooding eyes fixed immovably upon the world beyond the run. Above, the droning of yellow bees leadened the air with their heavy chant. Occasionally the dog would give a long sigh and the boy, with unceremonious fingers, would ruff the coarse hair that covered the Champion's head—that head over which countless judges had passed reverent palms.

It was a big day at the kennels when the Future Champion arrived. A son of the King, he had been sold to another kennel as a young puppy. Now, showing promise at nine months of reaching the physical perfection of his illustrious sire, Mr. Slade had bought him back at a fabulous price. On second sight he did not regret his investment. He and Henning spent nearly an hour sweeping their hands over his back, passing them in a perpendicular line down his front, rejoicing at his splendid bone.

The Future Champion did not enjoy this homage. Excited at his release from his crate after a two days' trip, he wanted to rush at will about the floor of the kennel showroom instead of being made to pose, his head held rigid in the air by a short leash. In fact, he refused to pose. When they jerked up his head, his hind legs caved in. When by sheer force they held his body in position, his gentle eyes filled with frightened protest.

Now, a terrier, to show well in the ring, must carry himself with boldness and assurance. As these qualities are supposed to be characteristic of the breed, a lack of them lessens his chances of winning.

The Future Champion's new master and trainer were not seriously concerned at his first performance—many puppies behave that way. But they determined to correct this fault and instil in the King's Son the pride of his forebears. One way of accomplishing this is to teach a puppy to look for a fight. Take a dog of a pugnacious nature and let him greet the puppy's friendly advances with animosity. Both dogs are held in leash, and the instant a fight starts and the sacred beauty of a winner is at stake they are pulled apart. The next time the puppy encounters a fellow dog, his faith in canine nature is shaken, and he advances belligerently, straining at his leash in the approved manner of show-terriers.

The King was useful on such occasions. He had a habit of seizing puppies by the nape of the neck with his teeth, and while he had never been known actually to injure one, he usually shook them into a state of indignation where they would have attacked an elephant had one presented itself.

There had been many encounters between the King and his various sons, but never one to compare with the meeting between him and the Future Champion which took place the morning after the latter's arrival. Johnny led out his old friend, who viewed the new puppy with something of the lofty disdain in which a veteran prize-fighter measures a new opponent in the ring. Slowly, with back and tail rigid, the Grand Champion advanced, his eyes focused in a watchful glare upon the puppy opposite him.

There was nothing warlike in the Future Champion's approach. From the tip of his ecstatic tail to his flopping ears he expressed joyous motion. His hazel eyes had lost their protest of yesterday, but their depths held a hint of appeal. "Don't disillusion me," they asked. "Show me that life is all I thought it was going to be."

The King, apparently, had no such altruistic purpose. He had method, however. It was his custom on reaching his novice adversary to stand rigid for a moment, wrinkling his aristocratic nose in a snarl. Whether the puppy quailed or retaliated made no difference. The snarl was followed by a spring. Lastly, there came the shaking-process.

On this occasion, the King followed his usual program. When he snarled, the puppy crouched low in a propitiatory manner, his tail fanning the air like a flag of truce, his eyes hopefully expectant. Just as his sire was gathering his body for the spring, the Future Champion made an unlooked-for move. With a friendly yelp and without warning he sprang first. The next instant his rapid tongue was licking the Champion's bared teeth.

Instinctively Johnny tightened his hold on the King's leash, expecting an indignant reprisal. The King, however, like many great characters, was vanquished by surprise. For a moment he continued his ominous growl. When the puppy ignored it, the older dog's body relaxed. Finally, as a sign of royal favor, he slowly and sedately wagged his stubby tail.

FROM that day, Johnny and the King played guardian to the Future Champion. Perhaps his youthful enthusiasm stirred their pity—they who held so few illusions on the joy of life. Perhaps, witnessing his impatience and misery at the confinement of kennel régime in the weeks that followed, they remembered a time when they, too, had rebelled against systems.

The puppy did not realize that as the King's Son and a future champion of the ring he must pay the price of royalty. He craved freedom, the freedom of the common dog who may roam where he will. Instead of that, much of his time was spent in one of the many boxlike cages with wired fronts that lined the kennels' main room. A show-terrier may not take much exercise or he

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becomes overdeveloped. For the good of the breed, kennels and dog-shows appear to be necessary institutions. Without them the various species would deteriorate and breeders would have nothing to work for. A show-dog's lot is a case of the individual being sacrificed for the common good.

Yet even a show-dog must have some exercise or he loses his health. Because they were on friendly terms, the King and the King's Son were often placed together in the big runway facing the open meadow. At first the puppy would appear content, sprawling about in the grass, teasing his dignified sire and rushing madly to greet Johnny when he joined them. He would soon grow restless, however, and press his eager body against the wire fence that separated the run from the country beyond. The fence bothered him. While Johnny and the King tacitly ignored it, enjoying such freedom as the lot afforded, he refused to accept it. His attention might be momentarily attracted, but sooner or later he returned to the fence, hurling his body against the wire in a futile effort to break his way through. Johnny would whistle and call, instigate a roughhouse, and do his best to compensate the Future Champion for his limited amusements, while the King looked on in thoughtful silence.

THE Future Champion's nights grew more restless than his days. Johnny slept over the kennels and would often wake to hear the King's Son give that peculiar whimpering cry which dogs utter when they dream that ancestral dream of the chase. The boy would steal down the narrow stairs leading from his loft bedroom and look through the wired front of the box where the King's Son slept.

The Grand Champion's quarters were next to the younger dog's, and he would peer anxiously at his friend as Johnny gazed at the twitching form of the sleeping puppy. They held their tragic element, these dreams of the Future Champion, who in real life was probably destined never to know the triumph of more fortunate forebears from whom these dreams were inherited—those forebears who pursued their quarry unrestricted through fields and woods.

The puppy's cries were never tinged with triumph. Even when he slept, the wired fence seemed still omnipotent, rising like a ghostly wall to cut him off from that ancestral pack which summoned him in a canine dream-world to join them in the chase.

At such times Johnny would open the door of the puppy's kennel and stroke his quivering body till the Future Champion woke and covered the boy's hands with lonely, frantic kisses. The King would thump his tail approvingly against the wall of his box, and the younger dog, rejoicing in such attention, would forget for a little his unhappiness.

There came a day, however, when the Future Champion could not be consoled in this manner. It was one of those afternoons when squirrels and rabbits and chipmunks seem to inherit the earth, defying a sleepy world to heed their boldness. Johnny and the two dogs had taken their post in the far corner of the runway, the boy and the King drowsing in their usual custom, the King's Son alert and restive. The meadow beyond seemed filled with moving things which set his brain on fire.

Suddenly the flaunting white tail of a rabbit gleamed through a tangle of grass. The puppy in a frenzy of excitement hurled himself at the fence. His barking brought Johnny to his feet. The rabbit, startled, ran a short distance, then turned and regarded the Future Champion with cocked head. By this time the puppy's yelps had become frantic. His brown eyes held an agony of yearning as he turned them on the boy. In his voice there sounded the despair of the captive who knows the strength of his dungeon, the tortured protest of the individual deprived of his birthright.

For a long moment the boy hesitated. Into his dull eyes there crept understanding, then speculation. At last he turned and unhinged a gate that broke the line of the wire fence. In a flash the Future Champion was streaking across the meadow after the flying cottontail, the dog's body bounding above the grass as if his contact with the earth served only to throw him into the air.

The boy at the gate watched him with grim lips and whitened knuckles, his eyes hungrily triumphant. Finally the enormity of his deed appeared to strike him, for he started across the meadow, stumbling as he ran, and calling in vain to the King's Son, whose bark came as but a faint echo from the far side of the hill. The King, seated majestically on his haunches before the gate which had slammed at the boy's exit, waited for his friends' return.

Dusk had veiled the distant hill in a curtain of smoke-gray when Johnny came back—alone—his clothes plastered with mud and burs, his face striped with black marks where twigs had stung him, his eyes heavy with worry and fatigue. The King licked the boy's fingers consolingly as they returned to the kennels, but Johnny walked like one in a trance, his lips forming the confession which afterward he delivered to Henning.

"I just let him out for a bit of a run and he got away from me."

Henning, speechless and profane in turns, his face the color of the dried liver he carried in his pockets with which to tempt the dogs, gave the alarm to the countryside. The police station first, then the farmers. Two chauffeurs were dispatched in different directions and mounted grooms from the stable were summoned and pressed into the search.

All night long, through moonlit, scented lanes, across still stretches of meadow, into the black gloom of silent woods, they sought the King's Son. Some claimed they heard his voice a great way off, high and triumphant, the cry a dog gives when the scent is strong.

Other searchers declared that at daybreak they saw him sweep across the crest of a hill, his body outlined against the sky by a silver streak of dawn.

The following afternoon they found him asleep by the roadside, his coat and ears a mass of burs.

When they collared him and led him to a waiting car, he limped after them on three stiff legs; but his eyes had lost their yearning.

That night, at Henning's advice, Johnny packed his earthly belongings in the straw suitcase the matron had given him on the day he fared forth from the orphanage. Mr. Slade, the boss, was returning from a business trip the next morning and, according to Henning, when he learned of the kennel-boy's perfidy, that individual might consider himself fortunate if he left with a whole skin.

Johnny met Henning's predictions with his customary reserve, going about his chores in his mute fashion as if he had never cast a bomb into the system's ordered régime. If it occurred to him as he brought his friends their supper that it would be for the last time, he gave no outward expression of regret.

But that night, when Henning had gone to his cottage, Johnny crept down to the kennel-room and stood for a long time gazing at the still form of the Future Champion stretched motionless in the drugged sleep of exhaustion.

THE following morning, clad in his town suit, his hair plastered primly on his forehead, his neck encased in a stiff collar, Johnny presented himself for his farewell interview with his employer. Mr. Slade, eating a belated breakfast in the living-room, glanced sternly past the boy as he addressed his butler.

"Tell Saunders we'll want him to take this boy to the ten-fifteen."

The owner of the Slade kennels then laid aside his newspaper, walked to his desk and opened his check-book.

"Your month's wages," he told Johnny as he handed him a check. He glanced at his watch. "You packed?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Slade resumed his chair by the breakfast-tray, crossing his knees and readjusting his glasses as he gazed curiously at the boy.

"Then, seeing there's time, perhaps you'll tell me what you meant by this performance of yours—turning loose my best dog."

Johnny's fingers twitched convulsively against moist palms.

"I just meant him to have a bit of a run, sir."

"You must have been gratified at seeing your intentions so fully carried out," his employer retorted. He took out his watch again, this time laying it across his knee. "Johnny Doone"—Mr. Slade's voice was stern—"you have just ten minutes in which to give some explanation of your action. I advise you to consider that since leaving the orphanage your only position has been with me. I have no wish to darken your future, but unless you yourself can suggest some extenuating reason for your conduct, how am I to give you even the briefest recommendation?"

Johnny's hands were engaged in wringing his cap out of shape.

"I dunno, sir."

"Henning has always said you were fond of the dogs," the man pursued thoughtfully. "You wouldn't like to have seen that puppy stolen or run over, would you?"

"No, sir."

"But didn't you realize when you let him out that either fate was likely?"

"I wasn't thinking of what would happen to the pup."

"What were you thinking of, boy?"

"I was thinking of how it was breaking his heart to see that rabbit go sailing by and not be able to reach it." This was the longest sentence Johnny had volunteered since his arrival at the Slade kennels. Perhaps his employer's glance of encouragement unloosed his tongue, or it may have been that a flood-gate of long-pent-up emotion overcame his shyness, for suddenly he took a step forward, and with awkward gestures and a jerky rush of words he broke out in a rather desperate eloquence:

"You see, you don't know, sir—no one knows excepting me and the King and some of the older dogs—what it means to have spent your life behind a fence always seeing things go by and never being able to go after them. 'Tisn't so bad once you get used to it. You wish so hard to get out that after a while, a long while, you can't wish no more. But that puppy, now. He's not reached that stage. He's just as I used to be as a kid."

The boy was standing close to his employer's chair. His self-consciousness was entirely forgotten in the earnestness of his theme.

"At the orphanage where I was brought up, sir, we had a yard—playground, they called it—with a big fence all around like the runs down here at the kennels. We weren't never allowed outside excepting when we was taken for walks once a week. Then we had to go two by two, and we couldn't fall out of line. All the rest of the time we had to stay in that yard and watch kids our age who lived in the town running about free."

"Car's here for the ten-fifteen, sir," the butler announced.

"Tell him to wait. Go on, Johnny."

"In winter, sir, when the country beyond our yard was all soft glistening snow—ours got trampled on and melted almost right off—we'd stand by the fence and watch the sleighs go by. The other kids would hitch rides and holler to us to come along, only we couldn't because of the fence. In summer they'd pass us with swimming-suits under their arms. Some of 'em had fishing-rods, too."

The boy paused, his somber eyes aglow with memories. Yet when he spoke again it was with his usual, halting briefness.

"I guess that don't sound to you, sir, like a good reason for what I did the other day. Only, when that puppy wanted so hard to get out, and I knew what he was feeling inside, I—it was his eyes and the way he carried on, sir—I couldn't help it. I just had to open that gate."

"Saunders says if the boy's taking that train he'll have to leave at once, sir." The butler again stood in the doorway.

With carefully puckered lips Mr. Slade removed his glasses and placed them in their case with a firm snap.

"The boy isn't taking that train."

AND so it came about that Johnny did not leave. The King, who that morning had sniffed anxiously at his friend's town suit, so far forgot his dignity as to give a sharp yelp of welcome when the boy returned to the kennels.

But what of the Future Champion, whose youthful spirit of adventure could never be satisfied by two days' freedom? Ah, you must remember that he *is* a Future Champion and the son of a King. For the sake of the breed, in order that future generations of terriers may attain his physical perfection, he must lead a life of comparative captivity. Comparative, but not absolute. The King's Son still dreams, but his dreams are different. His voice grows shrill with triumph. He is no longer among the uninitiated. In his kennel at home, in his shipping-crate on rattling trains, in his noisy quarters at the various shows he attends, he is never quite the lonely captive he would have been but for Johnny Doone—Johnny Doone, who opened the gate to freedom. Now, when sleep overtakes the King's Son, he joins that ancestral pack which hunts its quarry at will through ambrosial fields.

The Uneven Battle Between Destroyer and Conserver

FORAKER'S FOLLY

A Red-Blooded Novel of To-day

Luke Taylor Pays a Visit to Foraker's Folly and the Final Struggle Takes Place

By Harold Titus

Illustrations by R. K. Ryland

TWO men sat talking a long time, one summer evening, in a room of the Commercial House in the forlorn little town of Pancake, Michigan. Finally one of them rose.

"Then it will be up to me to fight you both," he said. "I've made my choice—I stand by this forest."

A gleam of triumph swept the other's face.

"And you want me to tell your father this?"

"Tell him just that."

Thus John Taylor gave his ultimatum to Philip Rowe, his father's confidential man. He had faith in the project he was championing, but more than that he was determined the woman he loved should get a square deal. That old Luke Taylor, millionaire lumberman, idle and disconsolate because his pine forests were now stripped bare, should contemplate acquiring for himself the several thousand acres of white pine almost ready for the cutter's ax which John had discovered seemed to him a dastardly thing, especially when added to the other attempts to crush Helen Foraker just as she was about to win out and demonstrate to the world the practicality of her father's vision.

Foraker's Folly, as this forest tract was known throughout the countryside, had been started many years before by Helen's father, who realized the inevitable consequences of the wholesale felling of the pine woods by the lumber interests. His scheme was to plant trees so that, the long waiting period once over, there would always be timber to cut. Long since dead, Helen had devotedly and courageously carried on his work under financial difficulties which were now acute because of failure to renew a mortgage and the imminent possibility of a great increase in the tax valuation of the property, both of which had come about through the machinations of Jim Harris, a rascally land promoter. The latter scheme had been temporarily circumvented by her stanch friend, Humphrey Bryant, but the thwarted Harris began to make overtures to an unbalanced individual named Stump, which probably boded ill for Helen.

John Taylor had met Helen while working on a difficult problem of his own in regard to the handling of lumber. She showed him a practical solution that won his admiration and finally his love, which he found was returned when he was free to speak. This was as soon as he could release himself from another girl, the cold and calculating Marcia Murray.

John wrote his father asking temporary financial help for Helen. The result was Rowe's investigation of the property, old Luke's determination to get it for himself, and John's decision to fight for Helen and her pine woods.

That fateful interview in the hotel was

overheard by Milt Goddard, who was Helen's foreman and whom she had several times refused to marry. Misinterpreting Taylor's words in regard to the forest, he went at once to the girl with the story that John was aiding his father to get hold of Foraker's Folly. He then made John face Helen and put him through a grueling examination. The explanation Taylor offered was unable to outweigh Goddard's statements, and Helen, crushed and bewildered, sent John away. In addition to cruel disillusionment, loneliness would now be an added portion to her misery, for she lived almost in seclusion with her household, which consisted of a faithful woodsman, Black Joe, who had been for long on bad terms with his wife, Aunty May. The pair looked after two children, Benny and Bessy, by arrangement with their legal guardian, Humphrey Bryant, who wanted to remove his charges from the influence of their only living relative, a dissipated youth named Lucius Kildare.

ABOUT the time Goddard was putting Taylor through his ordeal, the sheriff of Blueberry dropped into the *Banner* office. The editor was in the back room cutting paper for a hand-bill job when the official thrust his head through the open doorway.

"Howdy, Hump?" he said.

"Many of 'em, Joe! Anything special?"

"I'll leave it on your desk."

He disappeared, and Bryant went on with his work, but something in the sheriff's tone lingered as a disturbing echo, and presently he went into the front office and picked up a folded document.

When he had read it, he sat down quite suddenly, as though weary all at once. After a time his printer came to the door and asked about the paper.

"I started cutting it. Finish her up, Will," he said.

He rose and climbed the stairs to his rooms above. He took off his vest, for it was hot.

"Oh dear!" he sighed.

He drew out his own rocker to the window and then brought the other chair from its corner. He sat down, but did not rock. When he did move, it was to stretch out a hand and stroke the arm of that other rocker as though he touched the arm of a dear friend for sympathy and comfort.

It was there that Helen Foraker found him. She was well within the room before he was aware of her presence. He started up and summoned a smile.

"You're a ray of sunshine," he said wearily, "in a sunny but dreary day— Why, Helen!"—looking sharply. "What's——"

She turned away quickly and he moved toward her. But she faced him.

"Nothing much—but trouble!"

Her voice was hard and flat and her eyes were dry, and he read that in her face which she held back by heroic effort. He stood there a moment.

"Let's have it now. It's hurting you."

And, sitting in his wife's rocker, she told the story of Rowe's coming in short sentences, hands clasped tightly in her lap, not looking once at her listener. She finished.

"Luke Taylor? His—his father?"

"Yes; his father"—dully.

The old man leaned closer and put a timid hand on her clenched fists.

"And—he knew?"

"He knew, Humphrey. Oh, he knew!"

And with those words the flatness went out of her voice. It was the cry of wretched pain.

An hour later:

"I have trusted so few people in my life and of them there has been only one worthy. That is you, Humphrey. I'm depending on you now. I'm at the end of my rope, and whether I let go or can climb back depends so much on you."

"There can be no dodging of anything now," he said. "At times it has been easier to trust Providence and put aside thought of threatening influences and to think only of the present. But the present and the future are too closely linked to-day, Helen.

"I have tried to be your helper. I will try so long as my bones and spirit hold together; but to be an influence for good one must have standing or authority or security.

"I have had little standing among the men of this county, but I have had authority and security because I've kept my hands clean while they fingered the mire of political degradation. Until now I have been an influence because no man has dared question my integrity. They've dared everything but that—until now."

"Now?"

The old man drew the paper the sheriff had left from his pocket.

"This," he said, after an interminable pause and in a voice which was husky, "is an order to appear in probate court Thursday and show cause why I should not be removed from my guardianship of Benny and Bessy Kildare."

A flash of rage showed in the girl's eyes.

"Be removed!"

"Removed. They have looked over my annual inventory and find that I've loaned fifteen thousand dollars of the children's money on four sections of your land. They are now calling on me to prove that I have not mishandled the funds left to my keeping."

"But you can. Fifteen thousand—and for four sections!"

He smiled wistfully.

"I have not betrayed my trust; I have not made unwise investments. I can show that. Although our national ideal of justice is to consider the accused innocent until he is proven guilty, in practise the accused is damned forever. He may escape punishment; he may prove that he has been besmirched by foul hands for despicable reasons, but he can never quite live down the question that was raised.

"I have trodden upon the toes of a great power, of Chief Pontiac itself, and this is their method of fighting back. It's a good one—questioning the guardianship of a man over orphans!"

He cleared his throat rather vehemently.

"There is no charge that could be brought which would be more likely to ruin a man's influence. It may cost me my hold over the board in this matter of your taxation; it may cost me my seat in the Senate."

"Oh, not that! Why, it may not even be Harris who is behind it."

He shook his head gravely.

"None else, my dear. The complaining witness is Lucius Kildare, the children's only living relative. It is immaterial to comment on the mental caliber of Lucius."

"But, Humphrey, if you prove——"

"Vindication is not the important thing. You do need friends, but you need friends with influence, and if this matter reaches a hearing, my influence, I'm afraid, is gone. I will be scoffed at as a betrayer of orphans—a betrayer of orphans!"

"But what can we do?" she asked.

The old man rose.

"Do?" he murmured and, drawing down his spectacles, walked to the high walnut bookcase. He opened the glass door and took down a huge volume bound in black leather stamped with gold. He returned to the window and riffled the thin pages. Pausing with a thick finger on the passage sought, he looked at her with something like a smile in his eyes. "Do? Fight! Fight, my dear! Fight as the men of Henry the Fifth fought at Agincourt! Fight—because it is an honorable battle. Fight with the spirit that Shakespeare poured into the ruler of Britain. Listen!

"He which hath no stomach for this fight,
Let him depart. We would not die in that man's company
That fears his fellowship to die with us. . . .
He that outlives this day and comes safe home,
Will stand a-tiptoe when this day is named,
And rouse him at the name of Crispian.
He that shall live this day and see old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbors . . .
Will strip his sleeve and show his scars,
And say, 'These wounds I had on Crispian's day.' "

He recited more than read those lines, which reek with courage. His eyes snapped; his frame seemed straighter.

"And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered—
We few, we happy few. . . .
And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhood's cheap whilst any speaks
That fought with us upon St. Crispin's day!"

He closed the book and dropped it to the table. The girl rose. Her face was flushed and she breathed rapidly. The call to battle was in her blood.

"I'm not afraid of scars!" she said unsteadily. "With you, Humphrey—I will fight with you!"

He held out his arms and she swung into them and shuddered against his body; his hands stroked her hair; his old lips went to her forehead in a gentle kiss, and he lifted his eyes in a flash of suffering, for he knew that upon her heart that day were scars of which she never could be proud.

AND their Agincourt fell upon them.

The weekly newspaper from a neighboring county made its appearance with an article on the front page which began:

We understand that our good neighbors in Blueberry County are being hamstrung by certain interests which want to take money out of the county and put nothing back in the shape of taxes. It is said that underground political forces have been so successful in their blackguard activities that their new court-house, badly needed for years, and road improvements are halted for the time being.

Within twenty-four hours, farmers up and down the river and in the far corners of remote townships found marked copies of the paper in mail-boxes and did not need rapidly running rumors to establish the identity of the "certain interests" as Foraker's Folly.

Humphrey Bryant had taken advantage of an unexplained loophole in the law, the story had it, to enable Foraker's Folly to grow rich at the expense of the rest of the county. But wait! "Wait" was the word passed by the supervisors, who had said little and looked wise, for Harris again had them in hand.

And another sly story crept about—that young John Taylor, son of the great and remembered Luke, was no idle scion of a rich man. He had been at work for weeks to get possession of the Folly. He had come for that purpose; he had wormed his way into the girl's confidence and had then come into the open. That was why he was living in Pancake, boarding with the Widow Holmquist and awaiting the ripening of plans that would mean much to the town and the county.

When men came to Jim Harris for confirmation of this story, he shrugged and said little; but he said enough.

Milt Goddard heard the story and carried it to Helen.

"Rowe is making his cracks that Taylor was here all the time like a—a spy," he said.

She turned away so abruptly that the gesture was more stinging than any reply she might have made. Goddard's hour of triumph had been brief indeed. He had dismayed John Taylor, but it had gained him nothing—for the present.

Other happenings:

For instance, Rowe and Harris drove out toward Seven Mile Creek, turned off before reaching the mill and followed a pair of dim ruts along the edge of the swamp until they came to a small clearing with an ancient log cabin squatting among the balsams. There they halted, and Harris sounded his horn. Charley Stump appeared in the doorway.

"Hello, Charley!"

"Hello"—falteringly. "Who are ye?"

"It's me—Jim Harris. We come out to have a talk." He chuckled. "We want to settle, Charley."

The three sat down in the foul-smelling room and talked for long, quite earnestly, in low voices, and now and then either Rowe or Harris went to the doorway and looked out.

Charley stood beside the car when Harris started the motor.

"An' when it's all over will you give me a set of tires for my safety, too, Jim?"

"Tires? You bet, Charley!"

Both men laughed.

THE second day after Rowe's visit to her house, a letter, posted in Pancake, came to Helen. It read:

You will do well to clear out of this county. We have stood for your ways long enough and do not want you for a neighbor at any price. If you do not go of your own will, things will happen which will make you clear out anyhow. CITIZENS COMM.

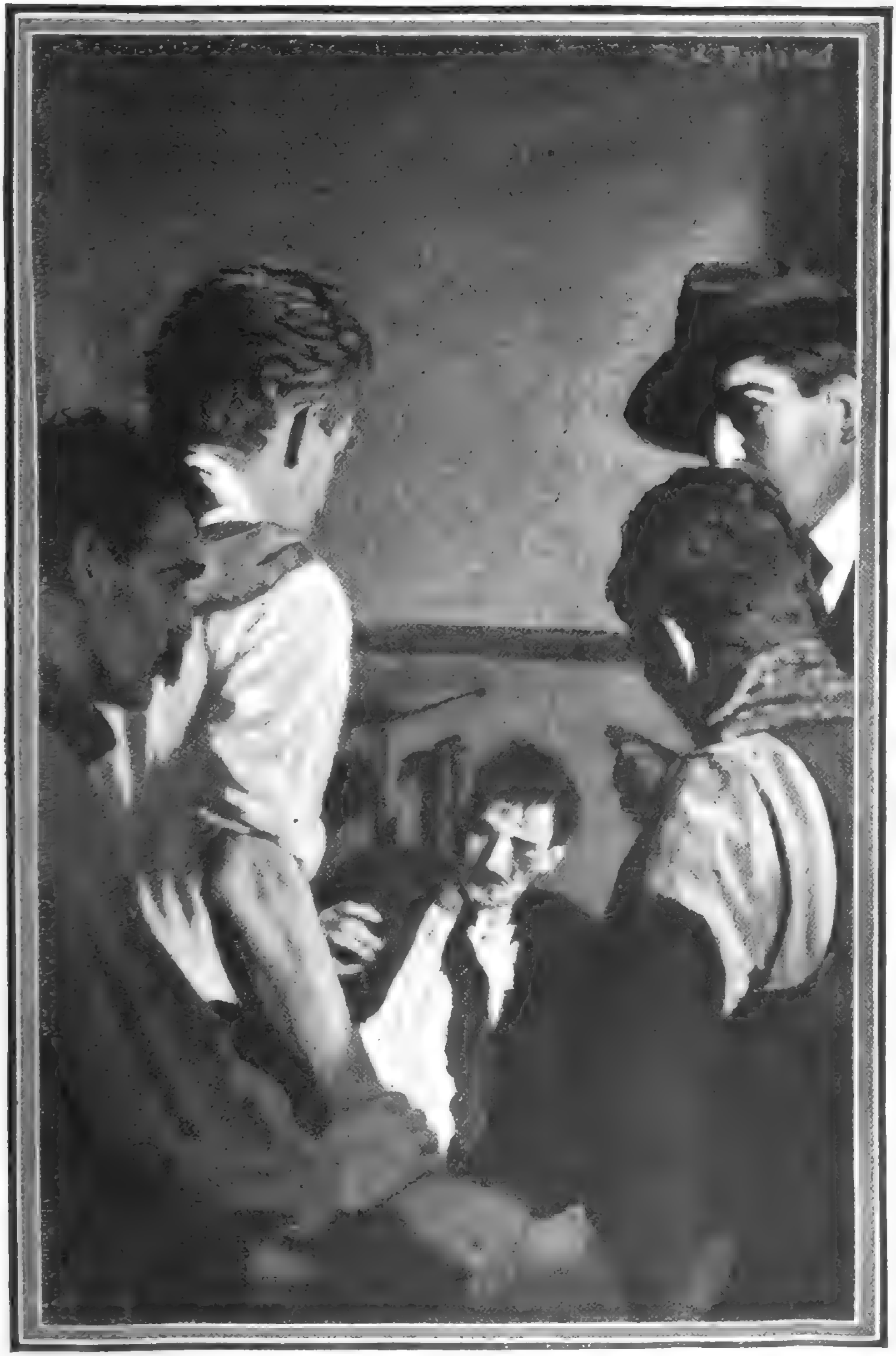
Later that day she carried it to the office of the *Banner*. Humphrey read it slowly, then snorted.

"Citizens' Committee! It's not hard to guess where this came from! I'd be willing to bet my last penny that Harris wrote that note himself and that Rowe looked over his rascally shoulder while he did it. They're thicker than thieves."

"Could we prove that?"

"No. Give the devil his due, Helen; they're slicker than eels. This is blackmail and they'll take no chances, just as they're taking no chances in trying to ruin me. I've haunted the court-house; I've tapped every underground wire of information I have, but they've cut me off. Not a soul knows a word outside the rascals who have planned it and the rascals who are going to execute their orders. They're saving this thing for a knock-out blow, and they're taking no chances of spoiling it by letting the plan leak. By keeping quiet they've everything to gain and not a whisper to lose."

Closeted in Jim Harris's room in the Commercial House that night, Jim and Phil Rowe and the judge of probate talked in low tones over their cigars.



John stood up, the sheriff holding his arm. "That ought to be pretty good," said Harris, with a laugh. "You all heard him say, 'I'll kill you, Rowe!' And look at Rowe's face!"

"If there's a leak we'll spot it," said Harris. "The three of us, the kid an' the sheriff are the only ones who know, except Bryant himself. He won't squeak, so if anything does get around, we'll know where it comes from."

His hand on the table clenched, and his eyes showed no humor as they fixed a penetrating gaze on the nervous little judge.

"If she comes off all right, we'll be able to answer the old question about who croaked Cock Robin, an' when I'm through with him, he can squawk as loud as he wants about Chief Pontiac's valuation an' they'll laugh him out of the county. I'm afraid of no robber of orphans!"

And so, while the county buzzed with hostility against Helen Foraker, that little group waited for the hour when Bryant, her only support, would walk from the courthouse a discredited man, for they knew, as well as the editor himself knew, that, for their purposes, the charge was as good as conviction.

Humphrey was to have gone to Detroit Monday night to find an investor to take up the mortgage which Wilcox, the new cashier of the Pancake bank, had informed Helen by mail must be met at the end of the month, when it was due. But the serving of that notice to appear in court Thursday altered all plans.

IT WAS on Tuesday morning that John Taylor entered the *Banner* office and confronted the editor.

"You've heard about me, of course?"

Humphrey pushed up his spectacles and nodded.

"Everything."

"And you think that I'm——"

He did not finish. The editor examined his pencil-tip carefully, then looked up.

"Helen has been like my daughter since her father died. I have no children of my own. I have no kin. I'm a lonely old man, and in her I've found an outlet for all the sentiment that old men have. What harms her, harms me."

"You believe, then, that——"

"I don't want to be unjust or hard, Taylor, but in this matter you'll have to excuse me."

A warning flash of unreasonable but natural temper was in his face, and John went out, standing a long time on the edge of the sidewalk, staring across the street.

He had gone about in a half-daze since leaving the forest yesterday. He felt numb and heartless and guilty and hurt. His mind would not stay on his affairs. He tried to put it there by a trip to the mill at Seven Mile the next day, but he was in a panic for fear Helen would come and he be forced to confront her. He was glad to be back in Pancake that night, but his room in Mrs. Holmquist's house, where he had sought refuge from Rowe and Harris, was stifling, so he walked down First Street and sought a chair on the hotel veranda.

Lucius came along the street, smoking a cigar with a deal of manner that indicated stimulants.

"Hello, Mr. Taylor!"

"Hello, Lucius!"

"Hot night."

"Yes. Hot."

Taylor hoped the boy would go on, but he mounted the steps and dragged up a chair, propping his feet on the rail.

"Hot an' dusty an' dead," he said ponderously. "Pancake's as—as flat as a pancake." His silly giggle confirmed the suspicion that he had been drinking. "Well, she won't bother me much more, b' God! It may be hotter in Detroit, but it ain't so dead, I'll tell th' world!"

"Going to Detroit, are you?"

"I'll say I am! Just's soon as I get this here, now, case off my mind, I'll be on my way." He waggled his head and hitched his chair even closer and whispered, "You know, Taylor, we got old Hump sunk."

"Sunk?"

"I'll say we have! Leave it to Jim. Besides"—brandishing his cigar—"I ain't no man to go off an' leave th' kids in a hole. That stuff don't go down, y' know, Taylor. Business's business, but when it's stealin' from orphans, why, that ain't business."

Taylor sat silent, every muscle tensing.

"Sure not," he said, watching the youth.

" 'Course you know all about it," went on Lucius. "Rowe says you're his friend, an' so does Jim. Fine feller, Jim. He give me this advice for nothin', an' even agrees to slip me a little change so's I can go to Detroit when it's all over." He giggled. "An' he slips me a little now, so a feller can enjoy himself in a town as flat's a pancake."

Taylor managed to hold his voice steady.

"You'll be pulling stakes soon, then?"

"Yup"—lowering his voice. "After to-morra, prob'ly. Y'see, th' case comes up at ten in th' mornin'. Jim says that's all there'll be to it, just have th' old devil appear in court an' answer my complaint that he ain't done right by Benny an' Bessy when he lends their money to th' Foraker girl." He rolled the cigar in his lips and nodded importantly.

"Then it'll all be over to-morrow? That will end it?"

"So far 's I give a damn it will. It'll ruin Hump, Jim says, an' that's all we want. He won't be hornin' into other folks'. business then." Lucius giggled. "Tha's all. I don' give dam 'bout th' kids. I don' care what they do to ole Bryant. I'm out after th' jack, I am! So's I can get to Detroit an' a real town." He nudged John with his elbow. "I'm from Pancake, but I'll show 'em a step or two when I land there with fifty dollars!"

"Fifty dollars is a lot of money," said Taylor.

"Not a cent too much. I told Jim it wasn't when he offered it to me to sign th' complaint over in th' judge's office. It won't last long—but, then, I can get a job easy; I can——"

He ambled on with his puerile boasts while Taylor's mind worked like lightning.

"Have you seen Jim to-night?" he asked.

"Nope. Don't 'tend to, neither. He give me five, an' on th' promise I wouldn't get jingled. But, Lord, Pancake's too dead for a sober man. Besides, I ain't told nobody but you—an' you know it. It's all fixed, anyhow. We'll have old Hump sunk, an' I'm th' complainin' witness, ain't I?" He sat up in his chair and swayed forward to peer closely into Taylor's face. "Can't do nothin' without me, can they? Can't turn a wheel, can they? Huh, guess I gotta right to get jingled a little on your money. I ain't any damn fool, Taylor. I know what's goin' on. All you fellers want is to get Bryant out of th' way so you can razee this Foraker gal back into th' brush an' you 'nd Rowe get her pine. B' God, I ain't so dumb!"

No; he was not so dumb. He saw through Harris's scheme and his words brought order and reason to Taylor.

So they were after Bryant, were they? They were fouling him? And then, with him out of the way, Helen Foraker would be at the mercy of Luke Taylor! This was Jim Harris's plotting, but he knew that Rowe's hand and mind had not been idle. John sat up.

"Suppose," he said, "that the case should be postponed. Suppose they should hold you here a long time—wouldn't you expect more than your fifty?"

"I'll tell a man I would! But 'twon't. Th' probate judge's fixed. My part's done in ten minutes to-morra. Night after next, I'll be steppin' out among 'em!"

IN THE pool-room across the street appeared the figure of Jim Harris, walking behind the tables, looking among the loafers in the far end of the room.

"There's Harris," said Taylor.

"Where?" Lucius started sharply. "Say, I better shake a leg! If he thought I'd been drinkin'——"

He rose. Harris was talking to the proprietor behind his counter. Taylor got to his feet.

"You'd better clear out," he said. "He'll see you sure. Here; come along!"

Half shoving the confused boy, he left the porch, whisked round the corner and was in the side street when Harris, scratching his head, appeared outside the pool-room and scanned the deserted street.

"Close shave!" whispered Taylor, slapping Lucius on the back. "But we're safe now."

A plan was forming in his mind, forming, oh, so slowly! He flattered the boy, directed a stream of inane banter into his ears as he led him down the dark street.

"You got any hooch left?" he asked finally.

He could see Lucius wink heavily.

"I'll say I have! Want a touch?"

"You know it!"

They made their way by circuitous route to the rear of the livery-stable.

Lucius entered the red barn, fumbled under the cushions of his rattletrap car and brought out a bottle.

"Here, Jack, ole kid; touch her off!"

He was exceedingly familiar, and rested an arm across Taylor's shoulders. John tasted the concoction. That was enough—one taste. Its vile strength gave him assurance; liquor like that fitted well with his maturing plan. He wiped his lips and passed the bottle to Lucius.

"Drink hearty!" The silhouette before him tipped the bottom up and the liquid gurgled.

They went out, taking the bottle, and wandered to the railroad track, where they sat on a pile of ties.

"Don't take too much," Taylor warned. "That's stiff stuff."

"Nev' min' me. I c'n carry m' hooch. Here; have touch——"

Again John tasted and held the bottle in his hands for a long interval thereafter while he talked, humoring the boy, laughing at his tawdry boasting, edging the talk further away from Harris.

In the distance, the south-bound night train whistled.

"Lucius, what if Harris throws you down? What if he gets you into court and then holds out on you?"

"Think he would?" The youth seemed sobered for the moment by the prospect. "If he did, I'd get him, b' God! Don' giv' dam 'bout th' case—all I wan' 's a crack at Detroi'."

"Let's move on."

They rose and went toward the station. They were the only people astir.

"Lucius, let's not wait for Jim! Let's make sure of this—go on into Detroit to-night!"

They were on the station platform, face to face, and Taylor took the boy's arm as he planted this suggestion.

"You 'n' me? Sure!" Then he shook off Taylor's hands groggily. "Sa-ay, what you wan' me to go to-nigh' for?"

"For company. I'm going down the line to-night. It'll be all right. I'll tell Jim all about it. You've done your share, and if they've got anything on Bryant they can get along without you. Besides, you're not sure of your fifty yet, and I'll buy your ticket."

Far off, a blue-white glare in the sky told them the train was swinging round the big bend, rushing down on Pancake, which was not a scheduled stop.

"You 'n' me? Lucius 'n' Jack?"

"Sure thing! I'll promise you a job if you go to-night!"

"Tha' righ'? Gimme a job? Say, Jack, you're all to th' candy—you——"

He said more, but Taylor did not hear. He drew a folded newspaper from his pocket and struck a match. The train was very near, the ray of its headlight swinging in toward them, throwing buildings into sharp relief. He struck the match and held it to the paper. The torch flared and he waved it. The locomotive-whistle barked twice, and fire streamed from the brake-shoes.

IN THE cindery seat of the smoker, Lucius settled himself with a satisfied grin. He fumbled in his coat for the bottle, drained it with no offer of hospitality, and then, tossing it into the night, pillowed his head on the window-sill and passed into oblivion.

"One to Peerless and one to Detroit," said Taylor to the conductor.

Peerless was the first stop.

Dirty uncomfortable men slept or smoked stupidly in the car. None paid attention to Taylor. He joggled Lucius, drew his head up from the sill, and it fell against the seat-back.

Quickly John searched the other's pockets, taking every penny of change except a lone dime. Then he took an envelope from his own pocket and wrote on it:

> Go to Mr. Richard Mason, Mason Auto Wheel Co. Tell him who you are, and that John Taylor sent you. He will take care of you and give you a job.

This he thrust into the boy's pocket.

The brakeman came out of the smoky vestibule.

"Next stop Peerless!"

Taylor lurched down the rocking aisle.

"Listen, Charley"—taking the trainman by the arm. "My drunken friend has just street-car fare. The address to which he's going is in a note in his pants pocket. Tell him about it, and keep this for yourself." He shoved a bill into the other's hand and went down the car-steps.

"All right, boss. Good-night."

Peerless, too, was asleep, but not so soundly as Pancake. There were a half-dozen street-lights, and one up-stairs window of a business block showed life. The metal sign of a telephone company reflected the glow from within.

John knocked and parleyed with a feminine voice on the other side. For some time entrance was refused, but finally a frightened little girl allowed him to enter.

For three hours he sat beside her switchboard while she worked to rouse rural operators and get a wire into Detroit. He did not let her rest and was rewarded finally by a sleepy voice in his ear:

"Hello, John! What the devil 's up?"

"You're up, and I'm up. Listen, Dick; I'm sending a man down for a job."

"Don't need any men."

"Makes no difference. His name is Kildare, Lucius Kildare, and he's on his way down with just enough money to get his hangover and appetite to your plant. Give him a job and keep money away from him. Ball and chain, if necessary."

"What's the game?"

"A big one. Do as I say, because it's more important than anything I've ever asked of you before. If you let this kid get back into this country in a month, I'll never ask another favor of you so long as I live."

A laugh came over the wire.

"If it's that serious, I'll put him up at the club. Or how about a strait-jacket?"

"Good idea and night! Go back to bed. Many thanks—until I can explain."

He walked out of the telephone exchange unmindful of the wondering stare of the operator. He strolled to the small station and sat down on a baggage-truck to smoke and wait for the north-bound morning train.

He reflected: This was the thing he could do. He could fight his father, Phil Rowe, Jim Harris—all those other men and influences that were aligned against Helen Foraker. He could put his best into that fight and make a courageous attempt to drive away the menace he had brought upon her. He owed her that; he would square his account.

He felt just the least bit heroic as he planned that fight, and a tinge of bitterness crept into his attitude toward the girl. She had professed to give him her love; when the crisis came, the forest was uppermost in her mind. Her life, she had said it was, and perhaps that had been truth, because she had shown no willingness to give him the benefit of doubt—after she had given him her caresses. Her ready defiance, which he had once thought splendid, seemed a weakness now.

And yet before the north-bound train stopped for him he became cold and lonely and was prompted to go to her and plead his case. But he could not do that, he told himself. He had been wrong; he had dodged and twisted and failed to meet the issue when it concerned this girl, who never dodged. He was small—small beside her.

Until midnight Helen had been out with Goddard and Black Joe, watching a ground-fire run itself into a wet marsh. She undressed very slowly and sat on the edge of her bed. Watch Pine whispered restlessly above her house this night and struck a responsive chord in her heart. Until now she had thought of John Taylor only with anger. He had come to her; she had helped him; she had molded him unconsciously into the sort of man she could love, only to have him strike at the vital thing for which she lived and worked. But tonight her weariness could rally no resentment, and her thoughts persisted in straying back to sweet moments—when he had fished with her at evening, when he had been beside her desk at night learning the things she had to teach, when he had talked of his father, when he had pledged his allegiance, and when his lips had first touched hers. Now she felt no wrath that he had come so close to her heart—only a sense of emptiness, loneliness. Was her forest all that mattered?

IT WAS an agitated county official who sat in the office of the judge of probate of Blueberry County and whispered into a telephone.

"I tell you, Jim, there ain't nothin' I can do if the complainin' witness don't show up. Can't you come down?"

"No; I can't come."

"But, Jim, what can I do?"

"Stall, you poor simp! Stall and give us a chance to dig up our party."

At ten o'clock Humphrey Bryant entered the court-room. The judge said:

"Say, Hump; I made a mistake in th' time. Come back at eleven, will you?"

And at eleven the editor was there—and waited until twelve, and the judge made excuses and went over to the hotel and inquired frantically for Harris.

"He said," said Henry, coughing into his pallid cigar, "he said if you called that he couldn't keep his engagement this morning. He said you'd understand."

Ten minutes later, Humphrey Bryant walked back to the *Banner* office.

It was evening before Jim Harris returned to Pancake. He was bland and good-natured, but rage seethed in his heart. He entered Rowe's room and flung off his vest.

"Damned if things don't pinch out!" he grumbled. "I'd 've sworn that kid would stay put."

"No word of him?"

"Not a whisper."

Rowe paced the room.

"That's one hold on her that slipped," he said. "We've got to get busy, Harris. The old man won't wait all summer, and young John—he's quick in the head; but I don't think——"

He did not say what he thought. His glowering look went out the window to the office of the *Banner* and rested there blackly. In the rooms above, Humphrey Bryant was packing his bag. To-night he could take up Helen's fight again!

It was after supper at the Commercial House. Harris and Rowe were on the porch, smoking. John Taylor came down the street. His face was drawn and pinched.

"Hello, Taylor!" said Harris. "How's tricks? Understand your cut's about finished."

"Yes; two or three days more."

"You'll be pulling out then?"

Taylor stopped beside him.

"No," he said. "Fact is, I intend to stay right here until another matter is cleaned up. As one of the preliminary steps, I want to turn some of your money back to you."

Taylor took a bill and some coins from his pocket and counted deliberately.

"A dollar and sixty-eight cents; that's right."

He held it out to Harris, who made no move to accept it.

"What's the idea, Taylor? You don't owe me a nickel."

"I'm begining to think that I owe you a great deal—you and Phil Rowe," Taylor replied. "This, though, is not on our account. This is the money turned back to you from young Kildare. I took it from him when he was leaving town last night to escape charges of conspiracy and perjury. This will make fifty-one dollars and sixty-eight cents that you have saved on this little flier, Harris. Take it, you rat!"

His words bit savagely as he took that one quick step which brought him close to Harris. The man reached out, almost involuntarily, for the change. It clinked in his palm. Taylor stood a moment, looking down upon them.

"Now," he said, "maybe we understand each other a little better. I said, Rowe, that I was going to fight you. This is the beginning." He walked quickly away.

DURING those hot days no cloud obscured the sun, but its light came hampered to the parched barrens through strata of smoke from many fires. Far and near the country was patched with blaze.

Within the boundaries of Foraker's Folly was efficient preparedness. In the open shed where Helen's car stood hung a rack of brass fire-extinguishers with drums of soda and tight cans of water. It could be lowered in a moment to the body of the car and clamped firmly there, to be hastened to any point in the forest. At a half-dozen points through her property small sheds housed two-wheeled carts laden with similar apparatus and shovels and axes. Also, three telephones were placed in strategic points so word of danger might be sent to the house without delay.

All day long a lookout swung in the top of Watch Pine, but when the smoke was dense, that vigilance was not enough, and from three to a dozen men patrolled the outer fire-lines. Some of these rode horses which were harnessed and ready to be galloped to one of the equipment stations and drag the apparatus to action.

It was racking work. Each night that brought no rain promised increased tension for the morrow, and Helen Foraker felt her nerves stretching taut. The smoke cloud was enough to think about, let alone that other cloud which hung over her—the emptiness in her heart!

There *was* emptiness there, and it grew with the days. And this afternoon, as she felt herself rocked gently by the wind—for she was on lookout herself—the girl gazed out across the forest that had been her whole life and was struck by its inadequacy. There was something lacking; something vital had gone and its passing dated to the hour of John Taylor's departure.

Benny Kildare appeared below and called in his high treble that he wanted to come up.

"All right; come slowly, Benny," she warned.

"There!" he sighed as he set foot on the platform. "Here I am!"

He took the field-glass and looked to the south and west.

"No fires in sight," he said. "Huh!" And looked at her and shifted his feet. Then, suddenly, "Aunt Helen, are you going away?"

"Away? No. Why?"

"Oh, Henny Raymer said his father said you were going away. He said it was a party."

"Party?"

"Well, Henny said you'd been invited to go away by the voters. Who is voters?"

She answered him absently, and took the glass to stare with unseeing eyes out across the smoke-screened land.

The first warning from the anonymous citizens' committee had come on Tuesday. Wednesday brought another, which she had not opened at once because she received it with other mail at the mill just as the saw struck a railroad spike buried in a log and scattered in ringing bits.

Raymer had scratched his head.

"Somebody done that," he said dully. "An' this mornin' th' weights had been taken out of th' idler box an' she wouldn't saw. We lost two hours."

Later, as she read the curt warning, she saw the connection.

To-day was Thursday and the relief which had followed the call from Humphrey Bryant, telling her that the case against him in probate court had been dropped for lack of witnesses was dissipated by the arrival of another warning.

She saw again Phil Rowe's ruthless smile, heard again his oblique threats.

Goddard came in that evening.

"What's the weather-report?" he asked.

"Continued fair."

She was strangely uneasy with Goddard now

"Saw Sim Burns to-day. He says he's got some cedar he's sold to Chief Pontiac. Wants to drive it down and says he'll serve notice on you to open the boom at Seven Mile unless you do it yourself."

"How much cedar has he?"

"I don't know. But there couldn't be over a car-load."

"We can put it over the boom for him cheaper than we can tear it out."

"Yeah. I said that. But he wouldn't listen. Wants the river open. He's doin' it to make trouble. The county's pretty well stirred up, Helen" — looking at her closely. "They're talkin' nasty."

"Talk is easy to stand."

"But there's more than talk. Those warnin's you get; what's happened at the mill. Helen, they're too many for you."

"You'd have me quit?"

His eyes shifted.

"I don't want to see you broken." His eyes raised again to her face, doglike, and she knew the plea that was in them, the plea which she had forbidden him to speak. "You won't listen to me," he said heavily, "an' I was right once, wasn't I? Wasn't I right—about Taylor?"

"Yes," she said. "Yes; you were right."

HELEN was awakened that night by the telephone-bell. She ran down the stairs and lifted the receiver.

"This is Raymer," a voice said. "A deck of logs is on fire and the others are in danger."

"Is your pump working?"

"The hose has been cut. We need help."

"Coming!"

She called to Goddard from the door, dressed and flew to the garage, where men were clamping the platform of fire-extinguishers on the body of the car. They raced through the night, with the stain of fire growing brilliant before them and came out at Seven Mile to see the mill in sharp silhouette and flames leaping high from one bank of her pine logs.

The chemicals went into play, and the fire was held to the one place, but it was daylight before buckets, used when the worst was over, could drench out the last embers. The hose, which was on its reel in the mill, had been cut in a half-dozen places. That day came another warning:

> What happened last night is only a start. Unless you make a move to clear out, we will show you what real vengeance is. CITIZENS' COMM.

It had been posted twenty-four hours before the fire broke out.

That noon, John Taylor, walking between two of his timber piles at Seven Mile siding, stopped shortly and then squatted and eyed the ground. Some one had been sitting there and moving his feet restlessly—not many hours ago. And in the sand was another mark—perhaps like that made by a bicycle.

John walked back along the edge of the swamp. The road was little used and grass grew rank in it. But here and there, where the ruts ran through black muck, the imprint of an automobile tire was set in perfect pattern. The car had stopped at Charley Stump's cabin and turned about there. He returned to Pancake on the afternoon freight, and before going to his room at Mrs. Holmquist's, he stopped in front of the Commercial House and examined the tires on Jim Harris's automobile.

It may be recorded here that the next evening the Widow Holmquist was talking with her neighbor.

"Yah; he ees a funny man," she said. "He ben out all hours of de night. Nefer see nodding like it, an' yoost to tank that he'd bring dat old Charley Stump to my house yust to give him a cigar!"

That night, Jim Harris, Phil Rowe and Wes Hubbard sat in Rowe's room. Harris was writing with a pencil laboriously, disguising his hand. He chuckled and then, as he finished, muttered, "Signed, Citizens' Committee."

The others smiled. They did not see the face which had peered at them over the transom nor hear a man move stealthily down the hall, carrying a chair.

THE house-party at Windigo Lodge was breaking up Friday. Dick Mason himself had been gone a week, but his guests lingered on. Those who had stayed were now bound for other retreats, but Marcia Murray had no place to go. She had hung on at Windigo because leaving meant a return to the none too comfortable apartment in Detroit.

That was one reason. For that alone she would have stayed on the Au Sable, but there were other matters of more importance.

She had let drop a detail at a time—the change that had taken place in John Taylor, not the change in his attitude toward her, but his new ideals, his new interest.

"Of course that's all very fine," Fan Huston had commented; "but, my dear, what has he to offer you?"

"Everything," said Marcia, and smiled.

"Everything! Why, he has nothing, unless his father——"

"He offers everything he *has*," Marcia corrected, "and that, of course, is very splendid but—quite intangible."

She forced a fresh gaiety, and on occasion put forth a stressed mockery which implied that it was John Taylor who was now being kept impatiently waiting. So much, to preserve her standing.

Phil Rowe telephoned daily. He had come once for an afternoon, and the visit had caused the lifting of eyebrows and a deal of whispering; but Marcia had been cryptic in response to attempts to draw her out. But to Rowe she gave her lips again and laughed close in his face, with her arms about his neck.

Rowe was as keen and ruthless in love as he was in business. He wanted this girl with all the intensity of a selfish heart; he saw through her, knew that she would go to any one of a score of men who might bid the highest, knew that she had favored John Taylor above himself. But there were two things in life he wanted—control of the Taylor millions and possession of Marcia Murray. The latter was dependent on the first, and he was bound to have them both.

He learned soon that John Taylor had slipped through her wily fingers and knew, therefore, that her one hope of marrying the Taylor fortune was in marrying him. Marcia was not wholly aware of this factor. For a time she believed she had succeeded in making Rowe think that John still regarded her as his promised wife, and she held to this lie while she told herself again and again that Taylor was a fool and that she was well rid of him.

But there were nights when she lay sleepless and even desperate. Give her credit for this: Beneath her exterior, which was as hard and cold as glass, there was a sense of human values, and when she saw that her appeal had not been able to compete with the wholesome womanhood of the girl of the forest, she had her periods of heartache and tears. And something else, which was now and again almost regret that John Taylor, changed, poor, without the ambition she demanded of men, was no longer bound to her.

She was to drive back to Detroit and was taking Fan and Tom Huston with her. She wanted one more hour with Rowe, and so, before leaving, she indicated that they must start early to provide for a few hours in Pancake where she could have some work done on her car.

Fortunately for Marcia, misfortune in the shape of a severe headache visited Fan

Huston, and as soon as they reached Pancake, she took to a lumpy bed in the Commercial House while Tom engaged in a Kelly-pool game with three drummers.

Marcia inquired for Rowe, and learned that he was out of town but would be back before noon. She bought a magazine and settled herself in the parlor of the hotel to await impatiently his coming. Her eyes were on the pages, her mind occupied with other things; she was inattentive to the comings and goings in the office across the hall until she became conscious that some one was staring at her. She looked up. It was John Taylor.

"Hello, Marcia!" he said.

"Why, John!"

She rose quickly, half frightened.

"I didn't know whether you'd want to see me or not." He was embarassed as he advanced and looked into her flushing face.

"That shouldn't have been hard to determine," she said coldly.

"I suppose not. I guess we have said everything to each other that can be said."

"We have."

She tried to breathe normally, but the leap of her heart would not let her.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I told you that once. I say it again, Marcia. I'm so sorry— But it was better this way than—going on, wasn't it?"

"Yes. Anything was better than going on." She tried to put sarcasm into the tone, wanted to wither him with her scorn, but somehow those mercenary impulses in her were weakening, breaking down. "John, I made a fool of myself that day," she continued. "There are a great many things I regret, and one of them is the scene I made before that girl. I must have hurt her."

"We all change, Marcia," he said, with a grave smile. "I'm glad if you're sorry. It *was* unworthy of you. As for Miss Foraker, though, you waste time feeling for her. She's used to unpleasantness. She's had more than her share."

"You think a lot of her, John?"

"Yes—a lot."

"And she——"

A hurt crossed his face. It was an ordeal to tell the truth, but he could not evade it.

"She thinks I'm her worst enemy."

A flicker as of hope showed in the girl's eyes.

"That's too bad," she said.

She meant that; but within her was confusion, a ferment started by a sudden rising of jealousy. But the Marcia who had first loved John Taylor for the sake of his father's money, who had played him against Phil Rowe, slowly dominated, covering the anguish in her heart with a sort of joy at his pain. But she did not want him to stay until she lost her temper, until she should taunt him. Already the jealousy was changing to the acid of temper.

She held out her hand.

"Good-by, John," she said, with something of the old indifference in her voice. "I wish you well. I must go look after Fan now; we'll be leaving at noon." She slipped past him into the hall. Her chin was up.

On the floor above she stopped and heard him go out. The doors of unoccupied rooms were open. She slipped into the nearest, closed the door and bolted it softly.

Marcia stood there a moment, hand still on the knob. The other went to her face and formed a cup over her mouth. Her head tipped back against the door-panel; her eyes closed. Then the tears came. She moved to the bed and buried her face in the pillow. For a long time she was there, gradually quieting. When she rose, she spent many minutes at the wash-stand repairing the damage her outburst had wrought.

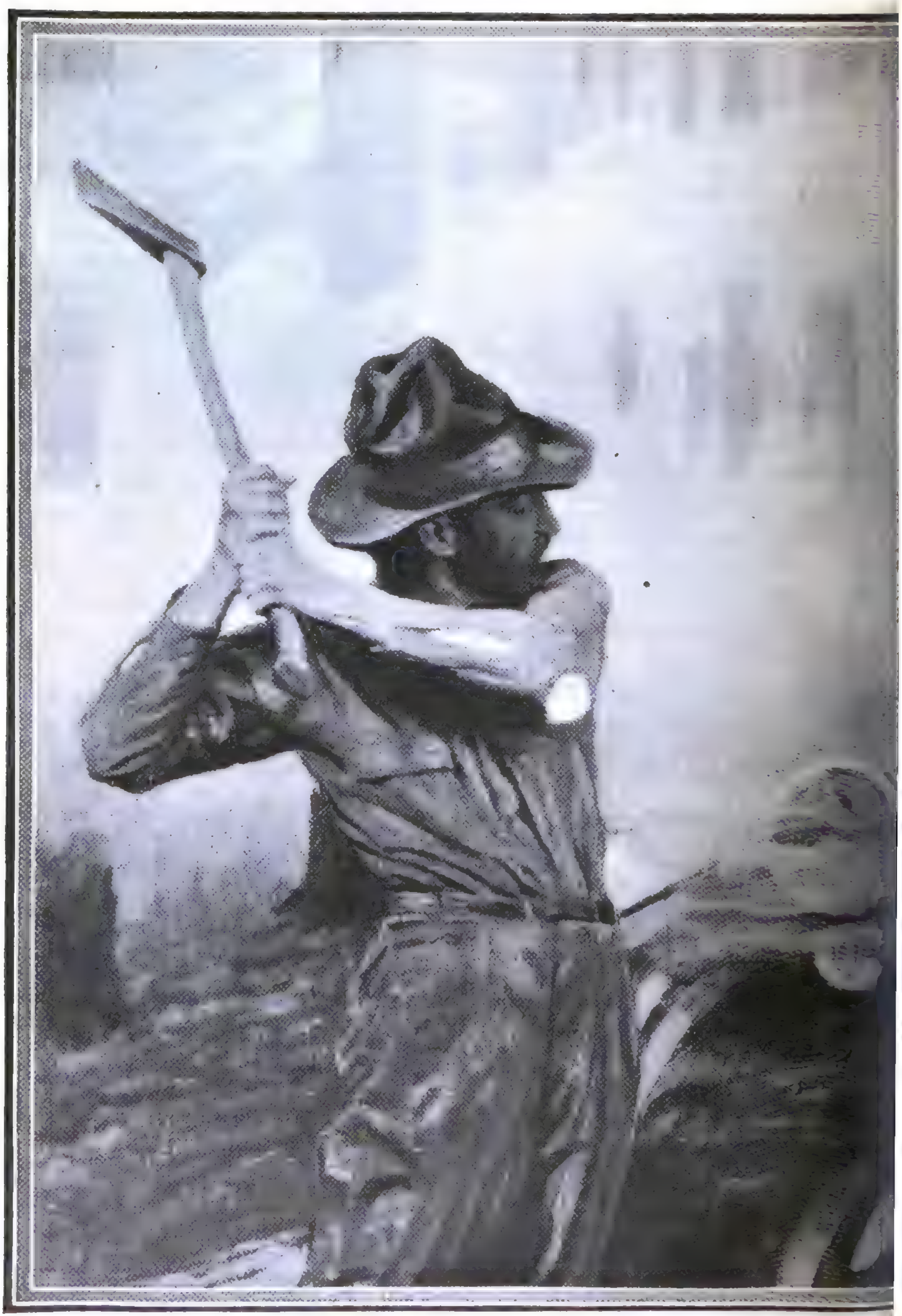
FAN HUSTON was picking up her things preparatory to departure.

Rowe and Marcia stood in the shadow of the hotel. The man was listening very closely to what his companion had to say. She talked rapidly, earnestly.

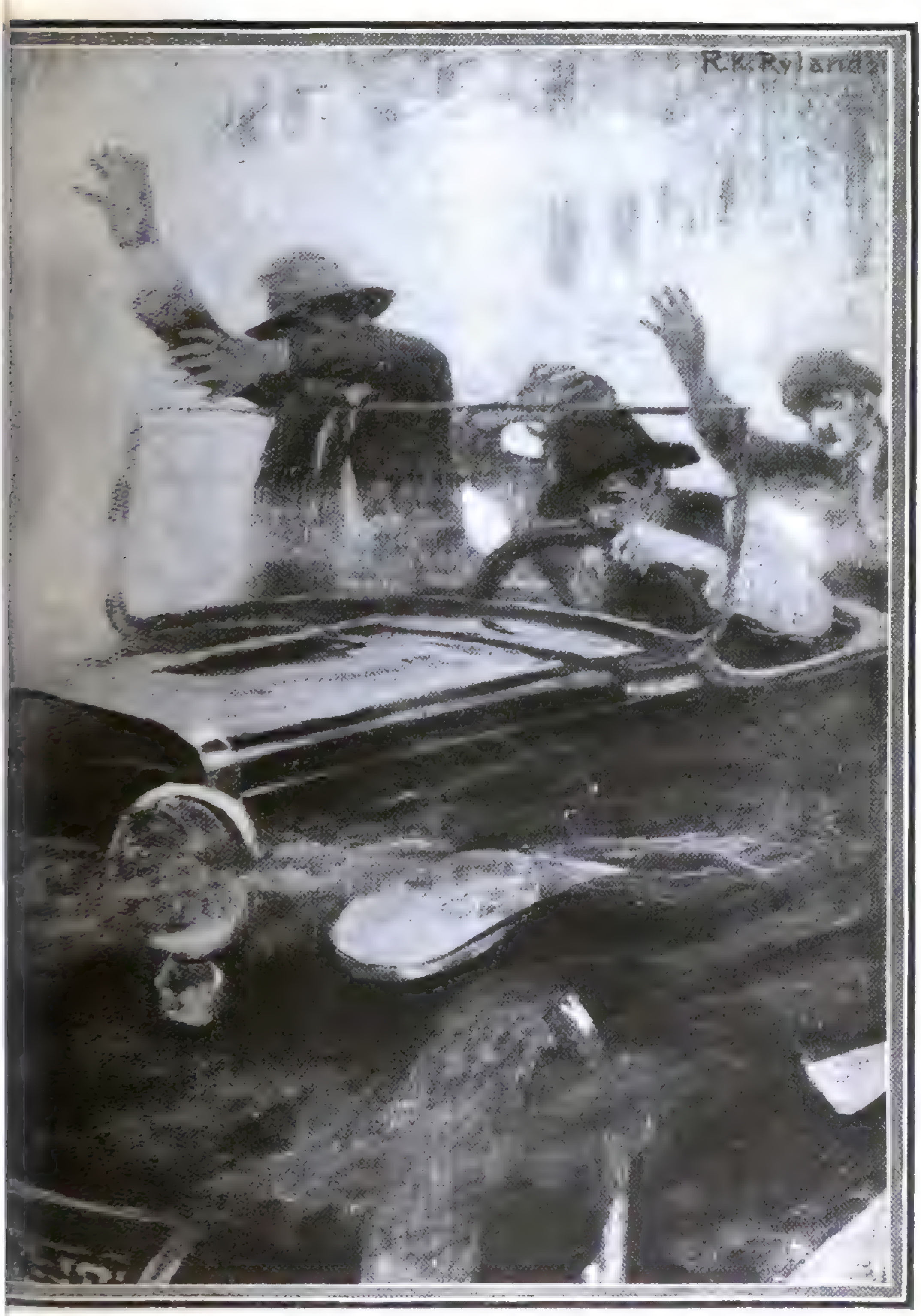
"I've been a waster," she concluded. "I've wasted the finest things that were in me; I've wasted my appreciation, my best ambition, my intelligence. It's too late now to turn back so long as there's a goal in sight. I haven't the courage. I'm twenty-five; being twenty-five and thinking as I have since I was in my teens means more than just being twenty-five— Don't misunderstand me, Phil. I can give you a certain happiness in return for the luxury I want. Without that luxury—no. This is your chance. If you fail, perhaps my chance will come later."

"Your chance?"

"My chance! I'm bound to you by my habit of thinking now. I have some confidence that you will be able to give me the



The man at the wheel made a gesture for Parker to step out of the way and then reached fo
forward. He swung the ax about his



emergency brake as Thad gave no ground. Parker moved, but did not step aside. He lurched thrice, as a hammer-thrower whirls his weight.

things I have chased for years. But if you should fail, I don't believe that I could begin over again, hunting fortune like a cat stalks its food. I'm weak—weak enough to want you to win; but if you should fail, it might be necessary for me to try something else. I might be a nurse or an office-woman or any number of things if necessary; and sometimes, lately, I've hoped it might be necessary— There—I mustn't cry. Here comes Fan."

When she had gone in a cloud of dust whipped away by the hot wind, Rowe stood at the curb a long interval, head cocked, watching the roadster disappear into the jack-pines. When he turned back into the hotel he was scratching his chin and his crafty eyes showed a strange bafflement. He had found that thing in Marcia Murray which had staggered him in John Taylor—honesty, genuine impulse. In her, however, it had been but a flash—to revive again only in case he failed in the game he played.

He snapped his thumb and laughed—somewhat uncertainly.

TUESDAY. Still the sun glared through the smoke of fires.

Humphrey Bryant came back on the morning train and, without changing from his best suit of black, drove in a buggy to Foraker's Folly. Helen read failure in his face even before he spoke.

"This credit situation isn't a newspaper flurry," he said. "It's real. Nobody wants this loan, Helen—not for the present."

She sat down weakly, and for an hour he talked, trying to be optimistic, without much success.

And then the girl talked, told of what had happened at the mill, told of the daily letters of threat. The butcher in Pancake had refused her check, and that stung her despite the fact that the garage-man had gone out of his way to be nice to her. Dr. Pelly had driven in to tell her that there were friends left her.

Thad Parker had walked over from his farm, where the sprouting crops were burned by the hot sun and cut to death by sand blown by tireless winds. He stumblingly told how he himself had lain in wait at the mill at night. He enumerated some of those in the community who were up in arms at the organized campaign against her, but they were people of little influence.

That night Thad did not watch the mill. Raymer sat in the doorway of his tar-paper house, a shotgun handy, until the approach of dawn, when he went inside.

He had not seen a slowly moving hulk come up to the edge of the brush and squat and wait, wait for hours, hardly moving. But when Rayner went within, the hulk moved back into the brush, wriggled prostrate on the far side of a charred log and went through the intrinsically innocent operation of lighting a cigar.

It crept forward again and waited, then rose and skulked in the shelter of the mill and appeared again on the dam, the glow of the cigar hidden in the curve of a gnarled and unsteady hand.

A crowbar prodded the earth, working down into the mud and muck. From his shirt-bosom the man extracted very carefully a bundle of greasy cylinders and tamped them down into the opening his bar had made, keeping dry the long white tail which extended from the packet. He looked about and listened. His head bowed down, and with both hands he shielded the glow of the cigar, held it against that white tail—a sputter, a careful scuttling across the clearing and into the brush.

The sleepy chirping of the first birds was stilled by the heavy, muffled detonation. Mud and dry earth were thrown high. The gravel of the road which crossed the dam was broken and cracked. Water filled the crevices, began spilling through on the far side. The seep became a rush; the rush washed out a gutter. This breach widened, and before half-dressed men ran from the shanties, the pond was roaring through the broken dam, lowering rapidly as its own escape made drainage faster.

On the carriage in the mill was found a soiled envelope addressed to Helen.

> So far we've gone easy. If you don't clear out at once, we will show you what we can do.
>
> CITIZENS' COMM.

It was hot in Detroit that morning, as well, with a steady breeze from the southwest which kicked up whitecaps on the river and made the pines in Luke Taylor's garden moan steadily.

The old man sat in his library, with the photographs of the Foraker pine that Rowe had taken spread about him on the table, holding a telephone-receiver to his ear.

"Hello—hello! You, Rowe? What the devil's wrong with you?"

"We've been delayed a bit, Mr. Taylor. The party isn't quite ready to close."

"Not ready! What's holdin' it up? Money?"

"Well, no— They haven't made up their minds."

"Oh, they haven't made up their minds they want to sell what I want to buy?"

"Money doesn't seem to be much of an object——"

"No object! My God, Rowe, you're no good! Come on home. I'll go up and close the thing myself— No; stay there! I'll be up to-morrow. Hear that?"

PHIL ROWE emerged from the booth in the Commercial House with the pallor of his face accentuated. To have the old man close the deal himself would rob Rowe of his coveted glory. And so much depended on that! The drawing of the new will—his future—Marcia Murray——

He stood on the hotel steps. Helen's car was across the way, and while he eyed it surlily the girl herself crossed the street and disappeared through the door of the bank.

Rowe remained there some time. He was in doubt, with desperation mounting quickly. Oh, for another fortnight—a week—a few days! But he could delay no longer. He started along the sidewalk.

Jim Harris sat beside Wilcox, the cashier, and as Helen entered they stopped their talk and looked at the girl and then at one another. The sheriff was writing a check. Sim Burns lounged in a chair. Wes Hubbard scanned a calendar in obvious effort to appear unconscious of Helen's presence.

She passed on to the one teller's window, made a deposit, took a packet of papers from her skirt pocket and went into the tiny customers' room. Soon a step sounded on the threshold of the room and she looked up to face Philip Rowe.

"Miss Foraker," he said and bowed, "may I come in?"

He did not wait for a reply but entered and settled into the chair on the other side of the small table.

"I was going to call on you to-day," he said. "Perhaps I, being a stranger, am better able to judge your situation than you are—because I have perspective. I have seen people in similar circumstances, but I have never seen any one so hard pressed by public sentiment as you are—through no fault of your own, probably"—with suavity.

"One cannot help admiring your pluck, but did you ever stop to consider that the line which divides pluck from—shall we say foolhardiness—is not very distinct? It is courageous to fight not only your neighbors but the laws of the state and the financial depression, but is it wise, Miss Foraker? Be honest with yourself. Do you hope to beat the game?"

Helen gave no indication of replying, so he went on:

"I came to you in good faith and asked for an option. I come to you again, Miss Foraker, asking you only to name a figure. We will not be niggardly. We will pay for value received."

The suggestion of a bitter smile moved the girl's lips.

"And if I continue to hold out?"

He laughed shortly.

"Then the trouble may become a little—rougher. You have been warned of that."

His insinuation broke through her growing temper, touching suspicion.

"That is your guess, you mean"—watching him closely.

"Not a guess. I happen to *know!*"

"You are bluffing," she challenged. "You are working in the dark."

He leaned forward again.

"I know what you know, that you have been warned repeatedly, that the warnings have proved to have foundation——"

"What warnings?"

She laughed tantalizingly, and he flashed, "Warnings of a committee of——"

He saw the triumphant smile flash into her eyes with the leaping rage as she stood up quickly and cried:

"So you know what no one else knows! I know of those warnings; my foreman knows; Humphrey Bryant, Doctor Pelly and others know, and for days they have tried to find who else knows. No one knows but you and the other skulkers who have everything to gain by scaring me out!"

Guilt crimsoned his face. He stammered something which she did not hear as she stepped past him and opened the door.

The sheriff, Hubbard, Burns and Harris were grouped about the cashier's desk; as she came out they looked at her and drew apart. Rowe was beside her.

"But you're making a grave charge," he muttered.

She wheeled to face him.

"Grave, is it? I hope the time will come when you'll realize how grave it is, when I can bring you to answer it!"

She stopped. Her scorching gaze ran from Rowe to that other group. She was unaware that the street door had opened and another man stood behind her.

"You citizens' committee!" she said, low in her throat. "You blackmailers!"

There was a stirring in the group, a muttering, but with a gesture, made imperious by her rage, she stilled them.

"I'm going to talk now! You've worked in the dark, but don't flatter yourselves that you've covered your tracks.

"You men—Jim Harris and his tools—you are the ones I mean, and let there be no misunderstanding! You have made a joke of law and justice in this county. You have stooped to the use of dynamite and fire to drive me out so Pontiac Power might profit and so Luke Taylor might make worthless slashings out of a growing forest!"

Harris stepped forward.

"You're putting yourself pretty thoroughly on record, young lady," he said. "You're going too far with your talk about lawlessness. You may find out that there's a law which will protect the good name of——"

"Good name!" she scoffed under her breath. "Good name! Is it your good name, Jim Harris? Is your name *good*, Mr. Rowe?"

"Hold your tongue!" Rowe cried in a shaking voice, and his viciousness staggered her for the moment. "You will have an opportunity to prove these things you have said. There are limits——"

A step sounded beside Helen. Breathing rapidly, she turned and saw John Taylor standing there. She did not see the glare he gave Phil Rowe. Then he spoke.

"There are, Phil; you're right. There are limits to endurance. You've overstepped them." His manner was quite easy, almost tolerant.

"So you—" Rowe began.

"You will keep still now," John interrupted, "or I'll thrash you until you grovel on your knees before Miss Foraker!"

Rowe drew back. A choking sound came from his throat and he shook his head.

"If you know what's best for you, you'll keep out of this!" he cried, beside himself. "You've blocked me for the last time, Taylor!"

John's hand was on his shoulder, gripping into the flesh. Rowe winced and twisted to get away from that grip.

He struck a quick blow, which glanced from John's cheek-bone, and cried aloud as he was lifted from his feet and slammed against the wall. And then he found himself bruised and bleeding on the floor, while men scuffled about him and Taylor struck again and again and cried:

"I'll break your spine! I'll kill you, Rowe!"

They were on Taylor, trying to hold him, scrambling and shouting as he flung them off to be at Rowe again. And then the sheriff, drawing his revolver, brought it down smartly on John's head—and the fight stopped.

He stood up, the sheriff holding his arm.

"That ought to be pretty good," said Harris, with a laugh. "You all heard him say, 'I'll kill you, Rowe!' And look at Rowe's face!"

Taylor felt his head, and blinked as clear consciousness came back. He was being led down the street, up the court-house steps, through the echoing hall; a barred door was closing——

Helen Foraker had heard, had seen the enmity between Taylor and Rowe. She stared at John, and, as he dodged that first blow, turned and stumbled through the doorway and ran across the street, leaping into her car, fleeing for the sanctuary of her forest where she could think and reason and try to straighten this thing out for herself.

She had driven him out, yet he had blocked Rowe in his purpose. He had betrayed her, and to-day he had been her defender. The throbbing of her heart almost choked her; wild hope and abject misery blinded her.

THE next morning the north-bound train stopped at Pancake, let off a pair of sleepy passengers, moved slowly ahead, stopped and backed into the switch, where the last car—with "Private" lettered on its doors—was uncoupled.

A curtain went up behind a screen, and

the thin face of Luke Taylor peered out from his stateroom. His old eyes roved the visible portion of the little town eagerly.

Luke's arrival had been watched. Phil Rowe, hastening into his clothes, stopped long enough to peer out anxiously and then went on, arriving at the precise adjustment of his cravat with dispatch.

Jim Harris rolled over, half hung out of bed, saw the car at the station, and lolled back on his pillow, stretching and grinning.

John Taylor, in a filthy cell in the jail, pressed his face against the steel bars of his small window to look. He had paced the floor all night. His blue eyes blazed with helpless fury as he watched Phil Rowe hasten down the street and mount the platform of his father's private car.

Rowe spoke quietly to the porter, who replied in a cautious whisper, but before the caller could sit down a muffled voice reached them.

"You, Rowe?"

"Yes, Mr. Taylor," he replied outside the stateroom door.

"Well, come in!"

From his rumpled bed Luke stared hard at his secretary, the chronic irritability which had been in his eyes yielding to amazement. For a long moment he studied the broken lips, the purple patch below one eye, the lump on a cheek-bone.

"Who the devil did that?"

Rowe made a grimace.

"Your son," he said simply. "We had a slight argument as to the advisability of your going ahead and buying this pine."

For a moment Luke said nothing. But a flush came into the face, and anger showed in the old eyes.

"He fought you to stop this deal?"

"And that's only part of it, sir. He has raised—quite a disturbance."

"Where is he now?"

"In jail."

Luke set his feet on the floor and stood up.

"In jail, eh? For what?"

"Assault."

For a moment the other stared at him.

"You're not lyin' to me, Rowe?" Impulses were in conflict within him; he breathed faster. "It was *that*, was it? It wasn't anything else? He did that because of me?"

"Yes, sir."

Rowe maintained his composure by effort. He saw the strange admiration in the old man's face, mingling with paternal instinct, with rage.

"No; you wouldn't lie. Jail, eh? Lucky for him—th' cub! Lucky he don't have to face me this mornin'—after puttin' that face on you—for tryin' to carry out my orders!"

It was nine o'clock when young Wilcox, flattered and flustered, drove his automobile down to the station and backed it in beside the Taylor car. He cleared his throat nervously as Rowe helped the great Luke down the steps, and got out of his seat to remove his hat, and self-consciously acknowledged the introduction.

Luke merely grunted at Wilcox and settled into the seat. He had nothing to say as the car rolled out of town and took up the twisting trail to the north.

They topped a high ridge, made bald by repeated fires, and away before them spread the country like a tinted carpet. But it was not the expanse of devastation, not the ominous smoke veil that caused Luke to sit forward sharply. It was the long blue-green line of pine trees, Foraker's Folly, standing there in the middle distance.

From afar their progress had been watched. Black Joe, perched in Watch Pine, had caught a reflected flash of light. He followed the progress with his glass, and called down to Helen,

"Big car makin' in toward Snipe Meadow!"

He offered to go over himself and watch, but the girl shook her head. In a moment she shoved her canoe into the river, paddled down-stream, rounded two bends, beached and went ashore, stopping to listen, but hearing at first only the sough of wind in the tree-tops.

WILCOX looked around to smile into Luke's face.

"It isn't the kind of pine you knew, Mr. Taylor, but——"

The slight gesture of a bony hand cut him off. Luke reached for the door of the car, shoved it open and stepped to the ground, where he stood, looking up and about, leaning on his gold-headed stick.

"Pine!" he muttered. "White pine! Michigan pine! Babies—baby pine!"

Rowe was beside him, and Wilcox was leaving the car.

"There's ten thousand acres like this—"

Phil began, but again that arresting gesture silenced him.

At Luke's feet was a section-stake. He half stumbled on it as he took a step and looked down. Impatiently he handed Rowe his stick and moved to the north edge of the line. He looked ahead and began to pace. Ten lengthy steps he took and came to a halt, looking to his left, counting with soundless movements of his lips; to the right and counting again, checking each enumeration with fingers that trembled. Another ten yards; more counting. Another ten, and again the checking of trees that stood to right and left. He disappeared into the forest, going toward the river ten yards at a time, now and then putting out a hand against a solid trunk for support because his limbs trembled with excitement.

Fifty-five yards Luke went, and he had estimated the timber on a quarter of an acre. Tolman was right; Tolman had been conservative. His heart rapped his ribs as it had not done in years.

Another ten—twenty—fifty-five——

"Pine!" he whispered, and then aloud, "Michigan pine!"

He ceased his counting. He tilted his head to the talk in the tops above him.

Another sound was manifest—the murmur of the Blueberry—and he moved on, emerging suddenly from the thick forest to the high bank of the river and there he stopped. On the opposite shore was a stretch of swamp with more pine on the high land beyond.

He did not see a canoe beached above him, did not notice a figure, just starting into the forest, which stopped dead still behind trees to watch him.

He stood a moment, letting his senses play with this great blessing which was within his grasp. Then he turned and started back into the forest.

Helen Foraker watched him go. There was in her eyes, behind the trouble, something like hope—a vision of an incredible opportunity.

"Where's the girl?" Luke asked, as he emerged from the forest.

"At her home, likely," Rowe responded, startled by the eagerness of the query and by the light in the old man's face.

"Let's see her now. By God, Rowe, Tolman was right!"

"If you think it best, Mr. Taylor. There are things—it might be best to have you go over the local situation, let me explain what we have done, call in Harris and perhaps some others. It—it's likely to be quite difficult."

Seated in the car, Luke said:

"Maybe you're right, Rowe. We won't take any chances. Let's get at it."

UP ON the edge of Seven Mile Swamp Jim Harris stood in Charley Stump's cabin. He had the old man by the wrist, and Charley had sunk whimpering to one knee.

"Afraid are you?" Harris snarled. "Afraid of what?"

"I tell you he's been watchin' me, Jim! He follered me."

"There's nothin' for you to be afraid of but me. He's safe. We've got him locked up. I can lock you up, too, for the rest of your life, you blackmailer! You do as I say."

He released his grip on the withered wrist and the old recluse rose.

"All right, Jim; I'll do as you say. Don't send me to jail, Jim! I'll do it to-morrow—at dawn, Jim, unless it rains— An' Jim—you mean that, about tires for my safety?"

"You'll get your tires all right, unless you go to jail. And you'll go to jail if you don't make good or if you get caught."

That afternoon, Rowe and Luke Taylor sat for a long time in the car on the siding at Pancake. Rowe talked rapidly, careful of sequence, and the other followed him closely. Later, Jim Harris came in and the three talked. Before Jim rose to go, he said:

"This feeling against her works for you. I've never seen so much resentment. Public opinion sure is playing into your hands, Mr. Taylor!"

"Public opinion, hell!" snapped Luke. "I knew public opinion before you were born, Harris. Business is business. Sometimes it has to get a little rough. But don't try to fool me, Harris; don't try to pull any wool over my eyes."

With a close approach to confusion, Jim made his exit while Phil Rowe covered his embarrassment—for his employer's scornful gaze had included him—by fussing with a broken cigar.

The new day dawned ominously, with wind in the west and acrid smoke making the early sun like a huge orange, fading to a silver disk as it moved upward.

The evening before, Luke had ordered his secretary to bid Helen Foraker come to him, and Rowe had returned from the telephone chagrined and ill-tempered.

"She won't come," he said hotly. "Wants to talk, but insists on doing it at home."

"Wants *me* to come there, eh? Why?"

"Says she has to be there because of the fires all around. I told her it was impossible for you to come."

"What 'd you say that for? Wants me to come, does she? By God, I'll run that rabbit into her warren!"

And so, in the blue-gray dawn, Rowe took the old man out of Pancake, toward the forest and the girl, who had tossed restlessly through the night.

Since the day before yesterday she had been in turmoil. John Taylor, fighting for her, fighting with his fists, with high rage for her enemies in his face— She could not picture him now, as a deliberate plotter against her well-being.

In his cell John Taylor sprang from sound sleep. The sheriff was unbolting the door to bring in a plate of food.

"When are you fellows going to give me a chance to pay a fine and get out of here?" John asked. "If I'm not loose to-day, there'll be something bitter for a crowd of you to swallow!"

The genuineness of his anger shocked the officer.

"You'll be took care of," he said. "The judge'll get around about nine, I expect."

THE men were going on patrol. Black Joe, glass in hand, descended from Watch Pine, shaking his head. It was no use; he could not see forty rods through the smoke. A car came through the murk and stopped before the door of the big house, and Philip Rowe got out to confront Helen. He removed his hat and bowed stiffly.

"Miss Foraker, Mr. Luke Taylor is here."

"You may come in," she said.

They entered the living-room silently. Helen turned an armchair to face her desk and stood by it while Taylor, still without speaking, moved slowly forward and seated himself stiffly. Then she turned to her desk and sat down. She had ignored Rowe completely.

However, he was the first of the three to speak. He drew up a chair for himself and cleared his throat nervously.

"In our first talk, Miss Foraker, I outlined Mr. Taylor's wants. I tried to make it clear that we were willing to pay a very fair figure and that the terms would be such as would enable you to realize on your investment and your work. Mr. Taylor comes here with a straight business proposition."

Helen directed her reply to Taylor himself.

"I have told Mr. Rowe that my forest was not for sale. Evidently he does not yet understand. I did not ask you here to-day to talk of selling."

"Not to talk selling!" Rowe cried. "What then?"

Helen did not remove her gaze from Luke as she replied:

"It seems that I have few confidences from the public. Consequently, there are not many things for me to explain. Mr. Rowe"—there was in the name the slightest amount of bitterness—"has indicated that I need help and that there is no help in sight. He is right—quite largely. That is why I wanted to talk to you to-day, Mr. Taylor. I want you to help me."

Luke's start was confined to the change in his eyes.

"To help *you?*" cried Rowe derisively.

Then, for the first time, the girl turned to him.

"Yes, Mr. Rowe. You appear to understand."

"I don't understand at all!"

"I do not want to sell. I want Mr. Taylor to give me the help I need so I will not be forced to sell. The financial depression is against me. My property is not taking care of itself yet; obligations are due; I have suffered the loss of my water-power, which cuts off all my income, and repairs mean an outlay of money at once."

"And you ask Mr. Taylor to help in this adventure?"

"Yes; for carrying my pine until the investment is ripe, so I may follow through a plan which has been followed for nearly fifty years and needs a few years more. Mr. Taylor seems to be my last chance. I—I don't care much about asking this of him"—with a slight hesitancy.

Rowe sat back with a whiff of amazement.

"This is so amusing that it's interesting," he said. "I take it you want a loan. How much—and for how long?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know?"

She shook her head.

"Only in a general way. It depends on what happens to me and to the lumber market. I need thirty thousand dollars at once. That is to take care of a mortgage coming due and rebuild my dam and give me a small working capital. I may need as much more next spring; perhaps a greater amount. If my taxes are increased, as the township officers have the authority to increase them under the present law, I will need help there. I will need loans from time to time until I can begin to make my regular turn-over—until I can start with a full annual-cutting budget."

"A what? Oh, then you *do* plan to cut this timber sometime! When, Miss Foraker?"

"I can't tell you that exactly. It depends on market values and interest-rates and how much capital I must put in. The cut begins when the stumpage value on approximately two hundred acres of timber is equal to the current carrying-charges."

ROWE drew a hand back over his sleek hair.

"Why the two hundred when you have ten thousand?" he asked. "You're sure of decent prices now and—you don't know how many more risks you will have to run in the future.. Our proposition is to take over the whole block; we're not interested in a little fraction. Why the two hundred, if I may ask?"

"Because I'm trying to establish a forest business, Mr. Rowe, a forest *business* in which the annual income meets carrying-charges and gradually amortizes the capital investment."

She waited. Rowe frowned. Luke blinked again. She looked as though this bored her.

"A peculiar business," Rowe laughed, "that heads straight into bankruptcy for the sake of an abstract idea."

"Is it peculiar business to keep the capital invested, *well* invested? My volume-growth of timber is increasing, increasing faster than the carrying-charges, and real quality increment has just commenced to show. I have told you that this business is not for sale. No offer would be satisfactory, but I shall soon have timber for sale, about two hundred acres each year. I will want to harvest it myself, of course, because no one else would understand the job. The stumpage value should come to around twenty dollars a thousand. It will increase as the output becomes steady and special markets are developed.

"When we commence to turn over, Mr. Taylor," she went on, turning to Luke, "we should produce about four million feet a year—indefinitely. But from the time the cutting starts there will be an increasing amount for fifty years because each year for fifty years there will be another year's growth on the balance of the stand, until the last cut of the first rotation would be a hundred years old. That would be very nice pine, Mr. Taylor."

The old man's mouth worked briefly and he swallowed; otherwise, no movement.

"And during all those years there will be a steady pick-up in quality. Dense pine cleans itself fast after fifty years—and we will be near the peak of the national shortage then. There should be prices, Mr. Taylor—big prices, to say nothing of the need it will fill——

"When that last block of the hundred-year-old pine is going through the mill, the first block will be back again, fifty years old and ready, and from then on there will always be a fifty-year-old lot ready for the saw—always, Mr. Taylor—always—*every year!*"

She brought a fist down on her chair-arm and shifted her position slightly.

In the pause, Rowe stirred.

"And every year the interest keeps piling up and the risks—you've really considered the risks, Miss Foraker, or do you just talk about them?"

"Risks!" she cried in contempt. "I've lived with risks since I can remember, Mr. Rowe. Lived with risks from fire to moles—and other underground workers! Because of those risks I must provide the forest with a margin of safety, as in any other business. My margin of safety is in the quality growth and increasing markets. If I cut too soon, I cancel my insurance of a future; I can't cut now and keep my capital intact. I will not cut now, because there is a chance for help left. Mr. Taylor is that chance. He could carry my pine until it is self-supporting; that will be only a few years, and then—forever after——"

She stopped speaking, for her voice had tightened. Rowe spoke again.

"Foraker's Folly! It seems to have been well named! Continuous crops from the same soil without putting anything back? That's considered bad business in agriculture. Anyhow, pine won't follow pine. Or will it, according to your theories?"

The girl looked at him again, forcing herself to remain patient.

"I am reasonably confident it will, Mr. Rowe, and quite sure that the soil will hold up. You see, ninety-seven per cent. of pine cellulose comes from the air instead of the soil. Properly tended forest-soil gets better for—well, for at least a good many years. Pine trees produce pine seed, and that seed will grow more pine trees. My books show that we netted over a thousand dollars on seed harvested and sold to the commercial nurseries last year. I hope that this item will almost offset the cost of replanting when we're finally under way."

Rowe's color was rising. He was conscious that Luke was looking at him.

"This gets better and better," he remarked sarcastically. "You are asking Mr. Taylor for help, and you don't know how much you need or how long you will need it. Do you actually know your capital investment, Miss Foraker?"

"Mr. Taylor may check my books."

"Your whole proposition is hinged on higher prices and a purely hypothetical timber shortage. In six months the lumber market will be busted flat. You ignore the billions of feet left in the South and the thousands of billions out on the Coast.

"There is timber—billions of feet. There was once in Michigan. Perhaps Mr. Taylor has friends who moved into the Southern pineries and are now junking their mills and getting ready to move into the Pacific Coast states, which will be their last stand in virgin stuff. The market may slump; everything is going to slump for a time; it's natural reaction——

"But the timber is going, and in New England they're sawing box-wood out of pine trees that stand in fields which were cultivated at the time of the Civil War. Your shoes, your clothes probably were shipped to Detroit in boxes made of that stuff. Why? Because it's grown on the ground and the manufacturers are tired paying freight-rates on material. Why, I can raise and sell white pine at Buffalo for less than the freight alone on Oregon fir and——"

"Oh, freight-rates! A socialistic mess! They'll come down; and, besides, you've just admitted that there *is* timber—timber in Canada and all sorts of places. Now let's quit this and get down to our proposition. Will you——"

Luke stirred.

"Oh, shut up, Rowe! When you don't make a fool of yourself with your questions, this young woman does with her answers."

THE old man turned to the girl, and his gesture marked the collapse of years of scheming and service and hope that Philip Rowe had erected.

"You've been talkin' a lot of moonshine!" Luke said sharply. "Like th' rest of your doddy generation—moonshine! But you make a case—th' sort of case that 'd convince a lot of old women." He ran a hand over his chin and his eyes flashed. "You need money all right. It'd do you no good to deny that and try to bluff me, but you've got your cheek, comin' to me for help!"

Helen did not flinch as he made the charge. Her eyes, very somber, gave him stare for stare.

"You are the only man I know who can realize the value—and who has the money. That is why I come to you. I would rather go somewhere else—but there's no choice."

"You're high an' mighty for a beggar!" he scoffed.

"I am only saying what I think."

He rubbed his chin again and his lips worked.

"And what makes you think you've got a chance with me?" he burst out. "I don't want to back you. I want this stuff for myself. That's why I sent Rowe up here to make a bargain. I come to buy somethin' an' you're in a pinch where you've got to sell. I offered to do th' right thing, an' by the Lord Harry you won't listen—but you come askin' favors from me!"

"Yes, Mr. Taylor; that is it. I do not want to sell, so I ask you to help me past the point where I might be forced to sell."

He sat back.

"You *have* got cheek! Cheek! You won't listen to me when I want to buy, but expect me to listen to you when you want my money—an' after you've filled that young cub's head full of moonshine an' turned him against his father—after I thought I'd found something in him! I sent him up here, a worthless cub; he makes good where I'd 've said nobody could make good. He makes a fine start an' for th' first time since he was a kid I was—proud of him.

"And then you pumped moonshine into him until his head's addled. He calls on me for backin' in some pine deal and gets me all worked up. I send Rowe here to investigate and find that th' cub don't want to buy but wants to invest in your damned moonshine!" He was gripping the chair-arms now, leaning forward.

"He fights his own father when he tries to buy this pine! He tries to do me at every turn so 's to help you, and ends up in jail because he beats up my—my bookkeeper!" He spat out the last word venomously as he glared at Rowe. "He's fought me to a standstill. He's fought me because you pumped him full of your moonshine; but that can't stop me. I've had everything I wanted until now. I want this pine, and you can't stop me!"

Helen settled back in her chair.

"You have had everything you wanted, Mr. Taylor. And so have I. But it happens now that we both want the same thing. I want it and you want it, but I am not going to let you have it, and you are going to let me keep it, safe—always."

"Eh?" He was stung by her confidence. "What makes you think *that?*"

"This," she said simply: "You think you have had everything you ever wanted. That is not so. You have missed the biggest thing, Mr. Taylor; you have missed contentment."

She was holding to the edge of her desk with one hand to keep her body steady; she spoke slowly, so her voice would be clear.

"I never saw you before yesterday, but I know a great deal about you. I had a man here only two years ago who worked with you on the Saginaw. Your—your son has told me about you. Your—your bookkeeper, here, told me in our first talk that you wanted this pine, because—well, not for the money. You want it because it will take you back to those days when you were happier, when you thought you were contented——"

"Darned moonshine!"

"No, Mr. Taylor." She did not lift her voice beyond its low pitch. "My father felt the same way; all you men who logged off Michigan pine lands felt lost when the last drive went down. And I saw you yesterday walking in my forest, walking in Michigan white pine. I think I know something of how you felt——"

His eyes fell away from her face; then flashed back.

"They're gone, the old Michigan stands, Mr. Taylor, but there's a new forest coming on, here—we're in the heart of it. If we go through with my father's plan—you and I—we can cut four million and up a year—forever."

"Moonshine! It's——"

"No; it isn't a dream, Mr. Taylor"—voice lifting. "It's *real!*"

She looked at old Luke with a sweet, confident smile. She saw the amazement in his face, the mist in his eyes. She saw him swallow, and then he snapped,

"Damn moonshine, I tell you!"

Outside, Pauguk whined sharply. A shout. A horse galloping. Black Joe ran past the house toward the patrolman who rode out of the smoke, crying:

"For God's sake get out there! It's south of the old cranberry marsh in the timber and comin' like hell. Somebody smashed the telephone so I couldn't call!"

For a moment the girl poised before Luke Taylor. Then fright came into her eyes and she jumped up and ran out the door.

Phil Rowe started and turned and smiled—as though he had suddenly remembered some pleasurable thing.

BENNY KILDARE ran shrieking across the dooryard to the big bell and began ringing furiously. In the garage Joe and the cook lowered the platform of fire-extinguishers to the car and clamped it fast. Helen was on the driver's seat, waiting for Aunty May, who hurried toward her.

" 'Phone Raymer at the mill to turn out everybody. Keep Benny ringing, and Milt will hear the bell. Tell him to send all men to me on lot eighteen—eighteen—south of the old cranberry marsh. Have Milt get

Sim Burns on the wire and make him come here with men. Threaten him if he tries to lie down. You stay by the telephone when he is through and get Humphrey Bryant and have him send help from Pancake if we send word to you we need it. All ready, Joe?"

"Let her go!"

The car shot forward from the small building and, careening drunkenly, rounded the house.

They crossed the pole bridge that spanned the river with a bouncing and a terrific clatter, due west, then north, sluing on the turns, into denser smoke with each rod traveled; to the westward again, and Helen fancied she could feel the heat of burning wood in her face.

"There she is!" cried Joe.

The brakes set and the car stopped in twice its length.

They were on the ground in an instant, Beauchamp and Joe tugging at the chemical tanks, running forward along the north-and-south fire-line, and then plunging into the forest to meet the advancing flames.

A muffled shouting behind them, a thwacking of a stick on flesh, and a patrolman galloped up, bringing his apparatus.

"Get in there, Thatcher," Helen said shortly. "There are three others. Take two tanks."

A brass cylinder in either hand, the man sped away, the girl behind him. The flames had started from the western boundary of the forest, and on this fire-line, a half-mile in, they could feel the heat, could hear the snap and crackle. The smoke smarted the girl's eyes as she ran forward.

A figure moved before her, crouched, going slowly toward the north—Black Joe, his tank upended and nozzle playing on the angry tongues of red flame licking along the ground, leaping here and there for a hold on a tree-trunk, falling back, trying again——

The spit of the chemical blotted these tongues out; the fire sputtered angrily as it was torn loose from its hold on firm wood.

She moved beside Black Joe without speaking, straining her eyes, listening. She heard a shout from beyond and a voice lifted in quick answer. The tank sputtered and went dead. Joe ran back to the car and came with the other fresh one, but before it could go into play the flames that he had beaten down had found hold again, and he was forced to fight a second time for ground he had already won.

The girl left him and went on. The fire was advancing from west to east, spreading north and south in a fan-shaped area as the wind drove it on. She passed Beauchamp, who coughed as he told her that he, too, had emptied a tank and was covering the same ground for a second time. She came on the patrolman who had reported the fire.

All along she could see those hungry, reaching tongues. One had found hold on a dead branch six feet up a tree and was waxing stalwart on the secreted pitch. She seized a stick and beat it out—and ran on, to see flames crawling up other trees.

She heard a horse snorting loudly as he came near with a cart of tanks, and, a working-idea of the size and progress of the fire in her mind, she stumbled back to join the fighters who gathered about.

"Joe, Thatcher, Beauchamp—you handle the chemicals. I'll refill. You"—to the other patrolman—"bring in the empties and take out the live ones. Make every pint count!"

AS SHE tore the lid from the cask of soda and opened the water-keg, she planned her battle—three men to fight, one man to carry. A tank was not good for more than a hundred feet of fire-front in this heat. Three hundred feet——

She shook her head. She needed help.

Another patrolman brought his lathered horse to a stop.

"It's all in this block," Helen said, without stopping her work. "Take your apparatus straight ahead. You'll stay in this east-and-west line. The fire will be north of you, and your job is to keep this flank from crossing the line. You'll have help as soon as I can spare men."

The man yelled at his horse. The frightened animal was trying to back and turn, and had no terror of the whip. Helen seized the bridle and led him forward, then sprang aside as he lurched on.

Her helper emerged. His eyebrows were gone.

"They can't hold it!" he gasped. "Soon 's they get it knocked down the wind throws her along again!"

The crackle and pop of burning wood was louder, nearer, the heat more intense, smoke thicker—greenish-yellow smoke, coming in puffs that spread about her and swirled and clung to the ground and then shot upward or rolled along among the trees.

Black Joe came on a run.

"It's hotter 'n th' hubs of hell! It'll go into the tops if we don't kill it—and once up there she'll go clear to th' river!"

"I know, Joe. Listen!"

From afar off, a feeble, thin cry came—the wail of an automobile siren.

"That's Raymer and help!" the girl cried, and laughed excitedly.

They came clanking through the smoke, Raymer and Goddard, Thad Parker and four others from the mill. They clustered about the girl, but before they could question she was giving orders. One by one she assigned them to their work. They scattered, and Helen, relieved of actual labor, turned her car about and drove back a half-mile to a vantage-point.

The snapping became sharp reports, like pistol-shots. A freakish wind, set up by the rising heat, eddied about, slapping downward and up, this way and that, scattering brands as it went. For a moment a strange silence, then the popping again.

Along the line of advancing fire the men worked, shirts smoking as they played their chemicals. They retreated slowly, always retreated. They could not even make a stand. Checked here, the fire found an opening there; subdued in this place, it gathered strength elsewhere.

On the flanks the advance of flame was slower, the heat not so great, the smoke not so dense. They could hold the fire from progress there. But that center kept on relentlessly.

From the tool-cache Goddard brought his equipment, and men ran along the first fire-line to the eastward of the blaze, igniting the duff and brush until forty rods of fire worked backward against the wind slowly to meet the fire which came on toward it. Men stood in the fire-line, holding their tortured eyes open to watch for brands that might cross the strip and fall into the timber on the far side to start new fires. To combat this menace, they carried wet sacks.

ANOTHER car came, driven by the clerk of Lincoln Township, bringing more aid; men ran to the work on Helen's orders, and the car drove off to summon others.

Black Joe came up on a panting horse. He slid to the ground and lifted his red, red eyes to the girl who stood in her car and gasped:

"It's a bug fire! Somebody's set it!"

"*Set* it?"

"It didn't come in from outside, Helen. Somebody drug a lot of dry bresh in offen that hardwood clearin'. One man, by his tracks. Must 've worked all night. He tetched it off twenty rod from th' outside fire-line. That's what made her hot from th' start."

The girl fought down the rising rage. To yield to such emotion now would play into the hands of this incendiary.

"Forget that, Joe! We'll get him later. Side-lines going to hold? Back fire all right? Milt there? Where's the front of it now?"

He answered her briefly and mounted again, but swung his horse back beside the car.

"If it crosses here"—indicating the line where the back fire had started—"you've got Burned Dog swale to fight."

"I know that, Joe. And we can't *let* it!"

Burned Dog Creek, a very small stream, drained a thin ribbon of swamp in the depth of the pine. It ran nearly due east until, meeting the abutment of a ridge that lay between it and the river, it swung sharply to the northward. But from the face of that bluff springs seeped, and for two-thirds of the way to its pine-crested top the balsam, which lined the creek, grew.

If fire should go down that swale, igniting the balsams, it would run rapidly, it would shoot up the inflammable cover of that bluff, mount the ridge, find hold in the pine again and sweep on to the river.

If Goddard's back fire should fail! They could make one more stand, true, but that next line of defense dipped through the first of the balsam itself, and if living flame got that far, their fighting this morning would have been in vain.

The draft of the conflagration sucked at the back fire. It moved faster, burning clean as it went. The two ragged lines of flame drew nearer. At a hundred yards apart each moved as fast as a man would saunter; at half that distance they reached for one another, fluttering, sweeping across the intervening space, gathering both speed and height. There was a sound like a great, savage sigh of triumph, and a sheet of fire rose from earth to tree-crowns and with a ripping, tearing, wailing fury of sound the tops burst into flame.

Trees rocked and twisted in the force of the draft. A mighty column of smoke spouted into the heavens, rising straight up, and from it came sounds of terror, sounds that went straight through the reason of strong men and touched raw emotions that had been buried for generations.

Men dropped their tools and ran. Goddard raised his hoarse voice in command to call them back, but he could not be heard.

They fled, scattering as the fire leaped the break and fastened itself in the tops of the trees they had sought to safeguard. Thad Parker ran down the line and would have gone on into the forest, heedless of all else but the impulse to escape this fiend, but Helen Foraker caught him by the wrist.

"Stay here!" she cried, and shook him. "I need you. There's no danger to you and we've got to try again. Won't you stay?" To another man: "And you? I need you!"

Others came up, singed, shaken men, and assembled about the car as Helen started her motor. They recovered some of their balance when they saw that she was not afraid.

"Get aboard, all of you!" she cried, and they scrambled up eagerly, for she was headed away from the monster that raged eighty rods back there.

She drove through the smoke, stopping at another tool-cache, swinging into the next fire-line, half a mile to the eastward, where she would make another stand. The men ran forward under Goddard, axes and saws and shovels ready for the new attempt.

The fire, which had leaped upward and swept onward with such initial savagery, hesitated when it entered the trees that stood above cool ground. No draft held it aloft there, and a mighty draft dragged from behind. A puff of cooler air slapped downward, driving a point of the fire from the top in which it burned to the ground. It found hold in the duff about the trunk. The crowns about it burned out; the fire dribbled to the dead needles again.

Once more men had their chance. The fire was again a ground-fire, no longer breaking through the canopy of tops.

Along the new line of defense trees fell, tops into the forest. Ax and saw slashed and bit, leveling the outer rows to make the break from canopy to canopy wider. And to the windward of these axmen others again started fire to burn out and meet and check fire.

Burned Dog tumbled through the pine here, and, just before it reached the fire-line, its current slowed as it settled into the head of the swale and the pine gave up to balsam and spruce.

Men worked like mad. Goddard drove them, tense and ruthless. Black Joe was there, barking the oaths of river-men as he drove the others into the work.

The hot wind, rushing down the creek, bobbed the stiff balsams, lifted their branches up to expose the pitch blisters. The nodding, the beckoning of those trees seemed to invite the visitation which would be their death.

BACK in the face of the advancing flame, where the chemicals had again been tried, men gave up. Human flesh and will could not stand before that blast. Unhampered, the flames leaped higher, ran faster before the wind, spread their front wider, and their growing draft again picked up brands and flung them out over the heads of those who worked feverishly.

"All hell can't stop it!" shouted Black Joe, as he came up to Helen Foraker, who was dispatching fresh arrivals to relieve worn men. "It'll hit that balsam and go down the creek to the bluff. It'll go up that like an explosion!" He started away. His last words echoed in the girl's consciousness, hammering at some hidden idea.

"Black Joe"—her voice was shrill, and he wheeled—"if it goes up like an explosion, can't an explosion stop it?"

"Huh? What's——"

"Dynamite, Joe! Dynamite!"

"God help you, Miss Helen! God help you!" he cried, with a new excitement, the stimulus of a fresh hope, in his voice.

A car was there, its owner begging for an errand. He had brought men from Pancake, men who, in other days, had scorned and scoffed at Foraker's Folly; but fire closes breaches, belittles differences.

"Take Joe," she said to him. "Push him, Joe!"

The man sprang into his seat, glad to obey her orders.

Across the pole bridge they tore, past the big house, on to a dugout on the river-bank. Boxes of dynamite were tossed into the car, a coil of fine wire thrown in, and, holding a box of percussion-caps high, Joe swore as he ordered the other to drive back.

Helen left her post. She could do no good there. Men were wearing out; they were deserting, sneaking away under cover of the smoke, and she kept among those who remained, a soaked handkerchief over her mouth. The sound of the oncoming fire increased. It commenced to mutter again, and the back fire, feeling the pull of that hot draft, leaped and ate toward its kind. A great eddy of fire and smoke was sucked upward and scattered to the winds. It left the tops through which it had passed only singed, but the brands it had lifted were snatched by the gale and swept along, falling into the balsam thicket.

A crackling followed. The swale was afire, and the flame, bursting from great puffs of thick, greenish smoke, exploding, leaping, swept on down the creek.

"Get Raymer!" Helen shouted, mouth close to Goddard's ear. "Send him to the top of the bluff—and come yourself!"

Again she sped with her car through the smoke, reckless of others who might be in her path. She went up a rising road, hot ashes falling about her, stopped and leaped out, calling to Black Joe.

Joe was on his knees, driving his crowbar into the brink of the bluff. A half-dozen others were doing likewise, making parallel rows of holes among the roots of those pines that grew above the ladder of balsam tips on which that fire would mount.

Others took up the work, and Joe, relieved, ran back to tear open the boxes of powder. Goddard joined him.

Thad Parker ran up, gibbering, an ax in his hands.

"It'll burn us all!" he screamed. "We can't get out!"

Some one grasped and shook him, but Thad would not listen. His eyes were those of a madman. He bit at the man who held him, tried to lift the ax and swing it at his captor. The other staggered away. Thad turned and fled into the smoke——

Joe and Milt fitted caps to the dynamite, and Raymer came up on a gasping horse. He caught the idea at a word from Helen and began setting wires.

The cars were backed out and down the grade, but Helen gave no heed. She followed closely the men who were making this, her last big play.

The greasy sticks went into the ground, one by one, tamped carefully in their holes along the brink. For two hundred yards they were planted and, when the last cap was being adjusted, the furnace blast from below tore at the crowns of the pine trees above them with the strength of a tornado.

Black Joe crouched on his knees, skin blistering through his shirt.

Through that bedlam of terror, Helen's voice cut like a knife.

"*Now, Joe!*"

She was thrown from her knees to her face as a thousand tons of loose sand were flung into the face of the fire. Outward and up and down it struck, more powerful than the flame. Trees on the brink rocked as the root-holds that had endured throughout their life gave way. They swayed and twisted, and three, one after the other, toppled slowly over into that smoking maw.

Smoking maw! The flame was gone. As a puff of breath will extinguish a candle, so that blast had blown the life from the fire. It would burn for days, perhaps, but it was no longer in the balsam tops. It was down where men could seize upon and fight it.

THAD PARKER had fled frantically from the monster that unbalanced his mind. Ax clutched in his hands, he raced through the forest.

He crossed the bridge and followed the road toward the Foraker house. He did not hear Benny and Bessy crying, did not heed the sharp questions flung at him by Aunty May, did not see Luke Taylor standing at a corner of the building, leaning on his stick and staring into the smoke. He went on, on along the road that led to Seven Mile, away from the demon that was ever at his heels——

A car rounded a curve and bore down upon him. Parker stopped, swaying in the middle of the road, eyes fast on the figure at the wheel.

The motor was four lengths away. Its horn sounded impatiently. The man at the wheel made a gesture for Parker to step out of his way and then reached for his emergency brake as Thad gave no ground.

Parker moved, but did not step aside.

He lurched forward. He swung the ax about his head thrice, as a hammer-thrower whirls his weight. He let it go and doubled quickly, with a shriek of crazy mirth.

Glass of the wind-shield splintered explosively. Wilcox, beside the driver, cried out. Bert Wales and Wes Hubbard, in the back seat, threw up their arms against the glass slivers—then rose and leaned forward.

JIM HARRIS made no sound. His hand retained its grasp on the brake, and he sagged forward over the wheel, a great, limp hulk. A purpling patch behind his ear sent out its first thin ooze of blood.

The others lifted him out of the seat as a roadster stopped behind them and Dr. Pelly, Humphrey Bryant and John Taylor gathered about the prostrate Harris.

There was little blood, but Harris's breathing was fast and heavy, and as the physician kneeling on the sand touched the bruise with light fingers, they saw the broken bone stir beneath discoloring skin.

"Isn't that bad, Doctor?"

Wilcox was the first to speak, and Pelly nodded.

"As good as dead."

The smoke-laden wind sobbed in the trees above them. For a moment there was no other sound, and then Thad Parker's weak, faltering voice rose in a thin wail.

"Dead! Dead! And I killed him! Before God, I killed him with my hands! I killed him, and he killed my wife, my hope! I— I——"

He whirled and would have run again, but hands clutched him. He struggled and shouted and laughed.

"Get him into a car and to town," said the physician. "Stark mad!"

Wales and Hubbard led Thad away and sat beside him on the cushioned seat, holding them there.

Philip Rowe came running from the house, and old Luke Taylor himself moved down the road to join the group. A third car stopped, and five men got out.

And another, trundling an ancient bicycle through the forest, halted and made as if to draw back when he came into view of those others. But he did not go back. Charley Stump stood there, stroking the bent handle-bars. The group about the unconscious figure shifted; Charley could see Jim Harris's face.

He left his safety and moved forward timidly. He stood behind them, listening; he saw the doctor shake his head hopelessly; he heard young Wilcox mutter as he turned away.

Charley dropped to his knees, hands clasped, staring down into Harris's face.

"Jim?" His husky voice rose uncertainly. "You ain't dead, Jim? Jim can't die now, Doc, can he? Not before he gives me tires for my safety, can he? He *was* goin' to give me tires." He looked anxiously from face to face. "Tires for my safety. Jim, you can't die. Jim!" He lifted trembling hands and looked about.

John Taylor then stepped through the group.

"Tires, Charley?" he asked. "He was going to give you tires for *what?*"

At that question, the old man rose.

"Nothin'," he whimpered. "He wasn't goin' to give me nothin'!"

He started to edge away, but John stepped before him.

"Yes, he was, Charley. Tell these men what you did to earn those tires."

"No, no!"

"Don't lie! You've given yourself away."

The old man stared about, sniffing, breath very fast, eyes hunted.

"Oh, I didn't want to! He made me—said I'd go to jail if I didn't set this fire."

A stir; added tension as the group became more compact.

"And what else? That's only a part of it. What else, Charley? Where were you the night the logs burned, the night the dam went out?"

"Oh, I didn't— He made me! He said I'd go to jail! He told me I would if I didn't set fire to her logs an' drive spikes in some an' blow up her dam. He told me that! He made me. I didn't want to, but he made me—he—he——"

Charley looked about as his voice died to a whisper. His roving gaze set itself on Phil Rowe's face. The man quailed and started to move away.

"Hold on, Phil!" It was Taylor again, and, after a moment: "What else, Charley? Who else threatened you?"

Slowly one of the withered arms rose, an unsteady, gnarled finger half pointing. The accusation came in a half-whisper:

"Him!"—halting the finger to indicate

Rowe. "He come the first time. They both told me I'd go to jail if I——"

"It's a lie! He's crazy!"

Rowe's denial, sharp and panicky, broke the tension. Men moved.

"It is no lie!" Taylor elbowed through them to be near Rowe. "You've gotten away with your last lie, your last piece of blackmail in this deal, Phil! Do you think I've been asleep? I've been just a lap behind you for days, you rat!"

Humphrey Bryant moved to where he could see John's face.

"I've got enough on you, Rowe, to keep you busy from now on! Harris, there, may be lucky—" John looked about, breathing deeply in anger, and saw Wales and Hubbard staring at him from the car, where they held the mumbling Thad. "And maybe others will wish they were dead before I'm through!"

His eyes ran over the faces before him and came to rest on his father's. His shoulders slacked and he shook his head rather sorrowfully.

"These are the things you have done," he said, spreading his hands. "This is why I've had to fight you."

Luke caught his breath as though to answer; but he did not speak. He half turned to confront his bookkeeper and then moved away, walking slowly.

There was shifting; voices lifted—questions, oaths, excited laughter. Humphrey Bryant's hand went out and grasped Taylor's arm, clenching there tightly in a pressure which meant all, but he only said,

"We came to help, and we're wasting time—now."

They moved, starting for their cars. And then a heavy detonation broke through the forest.

"Dynamite!" said somebody. "Let's get on!"

IT WAS late afternoon. All day the men who took orders from Helen Foraker had held the fire to the limits set down by the great blast. It burned briskly, hotly, but it was within their grasp and could not get away.

The wind blew steadily, and there was still danger in letting up until, above the shouts and the snap of burning wood, the moan of trees that had been saved, came a heavy, shaking boom of thunder. Through the thick smoke scattering rain-drops fell, sending up little puffs of dust in the fireline. The wind dropped; the thin shower abated—stopped—and then with a fresh gust it came in a hissing, drenching torrent. Soon the ruts of the road ran water.

Drenched, her face streaked with grime, eyes smarting, weak from effort and strain, Helen entered her kitchen. Aunty May met her in the doorway.

"You're a sight!" she cried. "But this rain'll fix it, an' I'm glad you're here." Helen took off her hat wearily and made no response. "He's in there yet"— gesturing toward the front room.

"He? Who?"

"That old devil!"—eyes snapping. "I heard what he had to say this mornin'. He's stayed here all day. All durin' the fire he had Injun kids from th' mill runnin' back an' forth to tell him about it, givin' 'em his dirty dollars!"

Helen's face showed amazement through its weariness. She opened the door and looked into the other room. Luke Taylor was in the chair she had drawn out for him that morning. He seemed more shrunken, more feeble as he sat far down on his spine.

He was not aware that she was there until she stood beside him. He rose slowly, peering close into her face.

"That old she devil tried to drive me out," he said. "Maybe I've got something like that coming, but I wouldn't go—not for her. I've turned hell loose on you, I guess. From what I hear you've got a long story to listen to." He paused and his lips worked. "You're full of moonshine," he rasped. "This is all damned nonsense, but you're makin' a go of it. You ain't got brass or cheek, like I said—just nerve—nerve!" He paused once more, and still she did not speak. "That matter you spoke to me about, that money you need—when you got to have it?"

She was numb; her knees were giving.

"Now—soon—within ten days."

He sniffed.

"I'll take a chance with you; I'll invest in a little moonshine—because you've got a nerve, and because you—because you're makin' a go of it. I'll let you have the thirty, and I'll fix it so's you can get more —when you need it; when*ever* you need it. But I've got to get a new bookkeeper first."

She closed her eyes.

"Oh, I thank you! I thank you!"

"Don't thank me!" he snapped. He was at the door, opening it, to let the roar of rain and forest in on them. "You get it"—he moved back a step—"on one condition."

She nodded.

"And that is that you'll let me come up here when I please—an' listen to 'em talk—an' listen. You're full of moonshine, but maybe you're right—about that four million a year——"

Something like a catch of breath checked him. He turned abruptly and went out into the rain. She saw him crawl through the curtains of the car, saw the white face of Phil Rowe as he started the motor. She turned to the mantel and lifted her face to the shadowed photograph of her father.

"All over," she whispered, and laughed shortly. "Saved—Foraker's Folly is respected! We've won, father! We've—Won? Oh, father, *I've* lost!"

It was there that Aunty May found her, hands clasped, staring blankly before her. She was not crying, had not cried; it would have been better so; the suffering in her face would not have been so terrible had it found the relief of tears. The older woman stopped short.

"Helen! What is it?" But she needed no reply. The old arms which for years had gestured only in irritation went about her hungrily. Helen turned and put her arms about the woman's neck and put her head wearily on a bony shoulder.

"Oh, Aunty May—I drove him away! I didn't trust. I didn't take happiness—when it came. He's fought for me even when I suspected him—and I can't ever look into his face again——"

That night, in a lull in the rain, Aunty May stood a long time in the doorway, peering at the lights in the men's shanty. A figure moved inside.

"Hey!" she called, in a cracking voice. "Send Joe here!"

He came.

"Black Joe," she said, "you've been wrong—for twenty years, you stubborn old devil! But I've had a lesson to-day. I've seen what misunderstandin's lead to. I give in. That's a woman's way—to give in, to yield, to take the blame. And I'll do it." His face grew alive with amazement. "Well, you old fool, ain't you ever goin' to speak?" she cried.

"May! May!"

Awkwardly he put his hand on her shoulder, and her arms were round him.

IT WAS the second day after the fire. All the day before it had rained, but at evening, just as the light was fading, clouds broke and a crimson sunset touched the trees with a blaze of jeweled glory.

In Pancake, Jim Harris lay in the Commercial House, swimming back to half-consciousness. Dr. Pelly had been constantly at his bedside since the operation. This morning he left, to go home and sleep. In the office of the hotel he met Humphrey Bryant.

"How's the boss of Blueberry County?" he asked, with a wan grin.

"Well, Rowe's out on bail, and half the supervisors are scurrying around trying t' find out where lightning will strike next." He chuckled and sobered. "How is he?"

"Jim? Well, he's a sick man, but since yesterday I've begun to think that Pelly's a damned good surgeon." A smile of pride wrinkled his face. "Another thing, Hump: I'd rather see a live stinker taking his mortal and certain medicine than a dead one goin' to a hell fire that's largely theoretical!"

They went out together.

"Thad?" asked Pelly as they parted. "He'll clear up all right, so far 's his mind goes. His heart, though—you can't mend broken hearts like we can a busted skull. That's one reason I want Harris to get well. I'm a vengeful cuss, I guess."

Helen was at her desk, busy with figures—ostensibly. A letter written in Luke Taylor's scrawl was before her, paper limp from much handling. She read his promises of aid again and looked out the window and down the road as she had been looking for an hour, ever since John Taylor telephoned from the mill.

"I am coming for a final settlement," he had said. "The last car of lumber will go out to-night."

His final settlement! With all the relief that should have been in the girl's heart, there was no rest.

She saw him coming down the road, walking slowly. He rapped, and she opened the door for him. Confusion was on each, and after the greeting they avoided looking at one another.

"Here is the statement from the mill," she said. "Is that right?"

He glanced at the totals.

"Right!" he said, and drew out a check-book.

He wrote slowly, painstakingly, as though it required effort to hold his hand steady. She watched him, with her heart high in her throat, hampering her breathing.

That was all. It was all over now, for he was handing her the check and rising, reaching for his hat. She looked at the slip of paper, but could not read.

"That concludes our contract," he was saying. "That and my thanks——"

They faced one another. Her eyes went to his beseechingly.

"Thanks? My thanks are due to you," she said.

"No; I—I feel as though I were testifying in a revival. You have done a great deal for me. I came up here a— I didn't amount to much. I have learned this: that I know very little, and perhaps that is the first step in finding out things. I think you are the biggest person I have ever met"—very humbly and almost shyly, as though his words were presumptuous. "You have opened my eyes; you have set me straight. I made you so much trouble. I didn't mean to, but it was because I was ignorant and didn't know it. I'm so sorry." He paused and flushed as he mustered his courage. "I was presumptuous. I—I aspired to things that were quite beyond me."

She was conscious that he was moving toward the door. She followed.

"It was I who made the mistake," she said. "I— Anything that menaced my forest menaced me. I couldn't see—beyond the pine. I was too ready to leap at conclusions. I was so suspicious—I'm so sorry."

They were outside, the girl on the bottom step. He was going out of her life because once she had driven him away unjustly. She looked up at the pine trees; they seemed so inconsequential now, to have so little meaning. He was denying what she had said; he was humbling himself to make her own suffering easy.

His hand was outstretched. She looked at it vaguely and placed hers in it.

"Good-by," he said. "Good-by and good luck!"

She could not speak. It was an affront to beg forgiveness; she had done the unpardonable. What she had to-day he had given her; what he was taking out of her life—she was to blame for that.

"Good-by," she said.

She could not see his face twitch as he turned away. She stood looking after him, holding her hand outstretched as he had released it.

Pauguk at the end of her chain whined and bared her fangs.

Helen turned into the house. It seemed that there was no warmth in her body.

MILT GODDARD, working on Helen's car, watched. He was at a distance, could not hear their words, but he could see their faces and their postures. That was farewell to them, but the big woodsman knew that it was no farewell. He saw that the impulse which could never be put down so long as life endures was in their hearts. He knew that, though John Taylor was disappearing down the trail to the mill, he was not leaving Helen Foraker.

For a long interval Goddard stood there. He tried to resume his work, but could not. The rage in his heart grew unbearable, and after a time he moved away toward the house, going slowly, silently, on the balls of his feet. The wolf-dog turned a quick look at him and glared back at the way her enemy had gone. He spoke softly to her, snapping his thumb. He grasped her chain, letting it slip through his fingers as he advanced. His hand rested on her back, and his fingers fumbled at the snap.

The wolf was free! She was starting forward, crouching, bewildered by this liberty. She dropped her nose to the ground; she went forward at a walk, at a trot; she reached the edge of the pine, stopped, circled, started on; the trot gave to a gallop, and then through the forest echoed the long-drawn hunting-cry of her forebears.

Inside the house, a movement, an exclamation. Helen Foraker appeared in the doorway. She saw Goddard, the chain in his hands, and, as she cried out to him, that long, curdling cry came again, fainter, reverberating through the trees.

"Milt! What——"

Guilty fright swept his face.

"He'd 've come back," he said. "He'd 've come back, an' you——"

"Milt, she'll kill him! You murderer!"

She started toward the trail, calling the dog breathlessly, and stopped and faced about. Goddard was running frantically away from her, looking over his shoulder, stumbling across the nursery, seeking the shelter of cover, of distance.

Again the hunting-cry—and again, more distant, barely audible.

"O God, help me!" the girl cried. "I can't let her—I can't——"

And then she knew that while her voice and reason had said farewell to John Taylor, her heart expected his return. But now—death sped on his trail!

She looked about wildly. An uprooted tree, caught in the rain-swollen current, was floating past, and her eyes followed it with strange fascination. It sped in the white foam. It was going that way—the way he had gone——

She did not cry out again. She leaped down the bank to where her canoe lay, bottom up. She lifted it in her slender arms made mighty by that danger. She dropped it into the current; she dipped the paddle deep. The bow shot out and swung down-stream, and kneeling in the bottom, sending the gunwale to the water's edge with every stroke, she drove the canoe forward.

The trail Taylor had taken kept close to the river for a distance, then swung sharply to the left, skirting a widening area of swamp; for half a mile it circled, edging back toward the stream, coming out at an old rollway and then holding straight through the timber toward the mill as the river swung away.

That was her one chance—to beat the wolf to the landing. If she should fail in that, she would be behind them and helpless—and Taylor would be powerless before the savage fangs of that animal.

ON THE far side of the swamp, John Taylor walked rapidly, hands driven deep into his pockets, head thrust forward. His mind did not function; it was numb, plastic, and he was conscious only of the heaviness of spirit, the hopelessness that had been on him—forever, it seemed. There had been no glory in his bringing Rowe and Harris and the others to answer for what they had done; there had been no sense of reward in knowing that he had thwarted the menace which he had brought upon Helen Foraker. He owed her that much—and more—so much more that he could never balance the account.

He was going away, he knew not where; he would begin again, with a new sense of values, a better balance, the caution which makes men stable. But he had no heart, no strength to plan. He wanted only to be away and forget——

Far behind him came the wolf-dog. Her eyes were very bright; her tongue lolled as excitement fevered her blood. Ever since that day when Taylor had struck her, the impulse to hunt him down and make him pay had been strong when her nostrils told her that he was near. And now she was free, for the first time since puppyhood, and her senses were functioning in her first hunt.

Out in the river, Helen rounded a sharp bend where the current flung itself at an unyielding bank, water boiling as she kept her broaching canoe from the smart eddy against the land. She straightened away, and a height loomed before her, faced with yellow sand. Along that height passed the trail.

Was she now too late? Had he passed? Had the wolf passed, too? Were they even then in combat somewhere yonder?

A mist dimmed her eyes and she shook her head to clear them, for she could not waste the movement of a hand. She rode high in the canoe now; her stroke was ragged. The rollway rushed at her. She lurched forward as the bow touched the sand and the stern swung down-stream. She stumbled into the water and floundered up the bank, heedless of her canoe, which went on down with the current.

She struggled up the sand bluff, mounted the overhanging rim of sod at the top, paddle in her hand. The trail was there, pitted by yesterday's deluge.

And a man's footprints, fresh—and nothing else!

She heard her voice screaming for him—and then heard another voice, that hunting-cry, coming down the wind. She had been in time!

She started forward. The wolf appeared, racing toward her through the cool shadows.

"Pauguk!" she cried. "Pauguk! Come here!"

For an instant it was as though her command had struck through the roused impulses of the animal, as though Helen's control through years of captivity would hold now. In that fraction of time the wolf hesitated, one forefoot lifted, nose quirking, and then the fangs which had been covered in that brief period bared, and a ragged snarl of defiance came from the throat.

The dog stiffened, and with a roar rushed toward her mistress, to pass between her and the river and be again on that hot trail.

The girl ran to head her off, gathering speed swiftly. And then the paddle swung hastily and the blade shivered as it came down on the creature's head. It slivered and was useless as implement or weapon, but it had turned the animal, swung her about, and though she scrambled, raging against the impetus of the blow, she went over the rim of sod, down into the sand.

She stuck her forefeet down stiffly, gasping as she fought against the slide, and turned on the soft footing of the slope.

She faced about, raging, clawing to scramble upward, and as she made her first lunge, a shout came to them from down the trail and John Taylor, arrested by Helen's cry, ran through the trees. All sounds from the wolf ceased; all her strength went into those swift, short leaps upward. Her eyes showed an orange glare; froth gathered on her lips, and hate was there not only for the man now but for the girl.

Helen hurled the broken paddle at the wolf and missed. She drew back, screaming a warning to Taylor.

THE head of the animal showed above the rim. She raised herself on her hind legs to scratch with paws for the hold that would bring her to their level, and then Helen, backing in fright, stumbled over the dead branch of a pine. It was as long as her body, as thick as her arm.

"Stay back!" she cried to Taylor. "Stay back!"

Pauguk found hold with her paws. One hind foot clawed for added hold. She strained, head flung back, froth on her breast. She raised herself high. She quivered with the effort to hold her balance. She heaved forward and was up, turning, drawing her haunches forward for that last rush.

The pine branch lifted high, poised, and, driven by all the strength in Helen's body, crashed down.

Its point of contact was the wolf's skull. It cut short the shrill yelp of exultation. It checked flight; it struck the beast down. She tried to hold to the brink as she swayed from her feet, and then went over, head and tail limp, rolling over and over, coming to rest at the bottom, head submerged in the current, a shapeless, lifeless body. The cudgel dropped from the girl's hands, and she lifted them to her face, covering her eyes.

Taylor was beside her. She felt his hand on her arm.

"Milt turned her loose," she said brokenly. "He turned her loose on your trail. He said you—he said that you would come back—and he didn't want you to come back—ever——"

John was so still that she lowered her hands and looked up.

"He said that I would come back?" he asked steadily. She nodded, mute before his manner. Something like great rage swept into his eyes. "And you came after me, to save me from Pauguk?"

"Y-yes."

"Why did you do that?"

"She'd have killed you!"

"Yes. And then——"

"Killed you, John—and then you never *could* have come back!"

She felt the grip of his hand relax; a great breath slipped from him.

"You wanted me back?" he whispered. "Wanted me back—after all?"

"Oh, I wanted you back *because* of all, John! Because I—because I— Can't you see that I——"

His arms, binding fiercely about her body, drove the word from her lips—against his lips—and she was crying for the first time in those weeks of distress, because there was no distress then, no misgiving, no emptiness, and she could cry—for the happiness that swelled in her heart.

Below them, the Blueberry hurled itself at the high bank, and above, between them and the clouds that sped across the brilliant sky, the canopy of pine trees that would never be of the past spread the cool mantle of their shade, like a hand touching them in a gesture of blessing.

THE END

The Hero

Should Bravery on the Battle-field Be Included in the Virtues with Which Humanity Is Endowed? The Delicious Vein of Irony That Runs Through This Gripping Drama May Cause Some People to Revise Their Views on the Subject

By Gilbert Emery

Published by courtesy of the author
and the producer, Sam H. Harris

SARAH LANE is the mother of two sons. *Andrew*, the elder, is a kindly, patient man, with a simple, affectionate nature. He is forty years old, a faithful, honest insurance clerk, and a good husband, son and citizen.

Oswald Lane was always gay, irresponsible, lovable, with a genius for getting into trouble. At sixteen he became involved with a girl in his town, then forged a check and made off. That was twelve years before, and no word was had of him until October, 1919, when, one evening, he came back as jauntily as though he had not left home in disgrace. He had served with the Foreign Legion, been wounded and twice decorated for valor.

Oswald is now twenty-eight and more than ordinarily good-looking, but he shows marks of dissipation, rough living and vagabondage. Despite his battered past, he has kept a youthful charm. He is easy to love and easy to forgive. The business of being a hero is tedious to him, and he takes the praises of his kinsfolk offhandedly and in embarrassment. He is more at ease with his young nephew, seven-year-old *Andy*, who is enchanted with his uncle and with the little yellow dog, *Cafard*, which *Oswald* has brought back from Belgium.

ANDY: Uncle Os, granny says you're a hero.

OSWALD (*on his knees by the dog*): Sh. Don't you tell Cafard I'm a hero. She might bite me.

ANDY: What is a hero, Uncle Os?

OSWALD: Oh! (*With a grin.*) A hero is a guy that does somethin' he wouldn't 'a' done if he'd 'a' stopped to think.

When *Oswald* and his brother find themselves alone for the first time, there is constraint on both sides. The younger man makes uneasy reference to his misdeeds and speaks of his determination to go straight.

OSWALD: Say, Andy, does Hester know?

Hester is *Andrew's* wife. She is of a restless, eager nature, much younger than her husband, and she has a charm that has not escaped *Oswald*.

ANDREW: No. I never told Hester a word beyond—well, that you was a pretty frisky young feller and run away from home. Pa and I—you know that part. We worked and paid back the money on that check you—and the bank let it drop. It came hard for us, Os, but if you've learned your lesson—why——

OSWALD (*uneasily*): Much 'bliged, Andy. You're damn kind. I—I appreciate how you all have—treated me.

Andrew thinks that *Oswald's* home-coming offers a good occasion to broach again to *Hester* the subject of getting rid of *Marthe*, a Belgian girl whom they took into their home during the war. *Hester* refuses to consider this, and *Andrew* is really ashamed of the real reason for his anxiety to get *Marthe* out of the way now, and so does not mention it to his wife. A while later, *Marthe* comes in to set the table for supper and finds *Oswald* alone.

OSWALD: Hello! I guess you're Martha.

MARTHE: Yes.

OSWALD: I'm Oswald—the prodigal son—the champion veal-eater.

MARTHE (*puzzled*): Veel-eeter? I t'ought you were a hero, *m'sieu.*

OSWALD: God! Have you got that, too? (*Then familiarly:*) You're a Belgian. (*She nods.*) I bin up in your country—visitin' King Albert—and Mrs. King. (OSWALD *can be engaging, and* MARTHE *cannot resist smiling at him.*) Oh—you can smile, can you? Martha—I'm goin' to call you "Martha," and you call me "Oswald"—see? (*Then, in horrible French,*) Martha—*vous et tray jollee!*

Marthe receives this coolly, but *Oswald* in amused silence takes her measure, then attempts to kiss her.

OSWALD (*holding her laughingly despite her struggles*): Aw, say, Martha! Hit a poor soldier? Why, say; I bin fightin' for your country. Got wounded up there. See that lame foot? *Vous et* naughty girl!

MARTHE (*in a tone of reverence*): Fighting—for my country! (*She is overcome with emotion. Then, in a low tone:*) It is *I*, who kiss *you*—for my country! (*She kisses him on the forehead and goes out quickly.*)

HESTER (*coming into the room*): Oh, there you are! Oh—you've made Andrew and your mother so happy, coming home like this!

OSWALD: I don't suppose it makes much difference to *you*, my comin' back, does it?

HESTER (*smiling*): Do you want me to say I'm sorry you came?

OSWALD (*ingratiatingly*): You're awful good—to—to your little brother.

HESTER: You're the first hero we've ever had.

OSWALD: Aw, cut that hero-stuff out, Hester!

Hester insists, however, on endowing him with her own lofty feelings about the war.

"They've laughed at me so here," she tells him, "because I cared about the war so. Oh, I *did care!* Awfully! Like you!"

Oswald receives this with amusement, which *Hester* fails to appreciate. She is very charming in her ardor.

HESTER: If it hadn't been for baby, I'd have gone. I'd have loved going. And doing anything! Washing dishes. Scrubbing floors. Anybody who's been there is just wonderful to me!

OSWALD: (*with satisfaction*): Oh!

HESTER: I suppose you think I'm—awfully foolish—like everybody else does.

OSWALD (*leaning toward her*): You want to know what I think? Well, I think you're just about the sweetest little bit of——

And so, before he has been a day in the house, the women have capitulated to him.

THREE months later, the rôle of prodigal has worn rather thin, but *Oswald* is still living on in *Andrew's* home—and in idleness. With unaffected modesty he discourages talk of his valor in France, but he accepts it as his due and makes the most of the indulgence that, as a hero, he is accorded.

One night in December there is a meeting at the church to raise money for French war-orphans. *Oswald's* story of his war-experience is one of its features.

He comes home before the others to keep a tryst with *Marthe.* A cablegram has come for him in his absence, and *Marthe* studies it uneasily, evidently a prey to disquieting thoughts.

When *Oswald* enters she rushes to him and throws her arms about his neck, calling him endearing terms in French.

OSWALD (*affecting good humor*): Break away, Carpentier; break away! Look out, kid! That shade's not down, is it? (*Then, a little irritably:*) No—say; I might want to use my neck again some time—if they should ever want to hang me.

Oswald is dressed in his *poilu* uniform, and he wears his *Croix de Guerre* and the *Médaille Militaire.*

MARTHE: Let me look at you! Oh—you are so beautiful in your uniform!

OSWALD (*flattered and more expansive*): Feels kinda good to get into the old duds again, Marty. You know, kid, I get kinda fed up sometimes with—with things here. All these damn rich—a fellow like me—what show's he got? They want to make him work for 'em—for the damn capitalists; that's what. 'Tain't fair! I got as good a right to be rich—better, by God!—and this old uniform's the proof of it. Good as those greasy hogs! Divide up property share and share alike, I say!

Marthe breaks in on this tirade with a passionate plea to be taken away. She has felt more keenly of late the displeasure which her presence causes *Andrew* and his mother, and their suspicions of her intimacy with *Oswald.*

Oswald Lane (Robert Ames) tells *Marthe* (Fania Marinoff), the Belgian refugee, how he fought for her country and was wounded. "See that lame foot?" he asks.

Little Andy (Joseph Depew) is overjoyed at his soldier-uncle's return.

Andrew Lane (Richard Bennett) and his wife, *Hester* (Alma Delwin) are not overburdened with worldly goods.

Photographs by White Studio

Oswald: You keep your shirt on, Marty. Old And hasn't got anything on you—nor on me. He couldn't see the hole in a doughnut—not if you took it out and give it to him. But if you feel like this about it—why don't you beat it?

Marthe then tells him she expects to become a mother.

"You see I must go," she sobs.

Oswald: O my God! Are you sure? Oh, this is a hell of a thing! (*Trying to get control of himself.*) Stop cryin', kid—I gotta think—you lemme think— Sure we'll go away—but you gotta lemme fix things. Don't you tell anybody. O God! Here they come! Stop cryin'!

THE *Lanes* come in, pleased and excited, very proud of the manner in which *Oswald* has acquitted himself. As a result of the enthusiasm his speech created, more than five hundred dollars was contributed.

Andrew is treasurer of the church, and he locks the money in his secretary, to be deposited in the bank next day.

Oswald made a favorable impression on *Andrew's* employer this evening, and *Andrew* thinks he may count on being offered a job. *Andrew* is delighted, but *Oswald* becomes surly.

Oswald (*truculently*): So—you don't want me in your house any longer? I s'pose you think because you put me under obligations to you once—you think you've bought me—but——

Andrew (*pacifically*): Os—don't talk that way. You know how we're fixed here. Just look at it reasonably.

Oswald—Aw—you'd drive a fellow nuts, you would! Why don't you come right out and say what you mean—that you don't want me here? You're like all the rest of 'em—fight for 'em—get wounded for 'em—croak for 'em, by God! Save their old country for 'em, by God, and then have 'em tell you to go to hell!

Andrew (*keeping good-natured with an effort*): Well—don't let's get to arguin', Os, Sunday night and all. I shouldn't wonder if what you've done over there has kinda tired you out and put you on the blink physically. (*He sees that he is making no progress.*) Of course, now that Marthe's goin' away——

Oswald (*caught off his guard*): Who said she was going? Driving *her* out, too?

Andrew: Say; cut that out, will you? She's goin' because she wants to. Told Hes so to-day. Say, Os (*anxiously*), there ain't anything—funny between you and Marthe—is there?

Oswald (*furiously*): No, there ain't!

Andrew can get nowhere with *Oswald* in this frame of mind. He is bewildered at his brother's antagonism to his well-intentioned suggestions. *Hester*, too, earlier in the evening, had put him down hotly when he broached the matter of a job for *Oswald*.

It is all very puzzling to *Andrew*, and he gives it up. He says good-night to them all and, with a last injunction to *Hester* to put the money in the bank the first thing in the morning, he leaves for New Brunswick. On account of there being so much money in the house, *Oswald* agrees to sleep downstairs on the sitting-room sofa. *Hester* flutters round him with blankets and pillows, and *Oswald* makes no effort to hide his boredom at her attentions. He gives her no satisfaction when she questions him about his altercation with *Andrew*.

Hester: You—you aren't offended with me? About anything—are you?

Oswald: Me? Nope.

Hester: You'll be cold without a blanket.

Oswald: I been colder.

Suddenly she bursts into tears.

"I—I—don't know what's the matter with me to-night" she cries. "It's made—all the difference—having you here with us."

Oswald: I'm going away.

Hester (*fiercely*): What has Andrew been saying to you?

Oswald: Oh, I don't know. Handed me a little bokay or two about being a yellow dog, and a cheap skate and a chippy-chaser—and one thing and another.

Hester (*horrified*): Oswald! Oh, you, you must be mistaken! He—he didn't mean it. He—he couldn't have——

Oswald: See here, sis; what's the good of all this? You don't want to get hot under the collar against And. I know you take this war-stuff pretty seriously and all that. I wish to God there was more women like you. I know how you feel. But you just better forget all about it. I'm goin' away.

Hester: I'll never forgive him! Never! *Never!*

Oswald's coat is ripped, and *Hester* eagerly seizes the chance to express herself in service. She is groping to find her own feelings. Her limited experience has never before brought her to a crisis like this. *Oswald* is half pitying, half amused. *Hester's* devotion bores him, but he can't smother the desire to test her out.

Oswald: You're a good little sis.

Hester: I love to do things for you—don't you like me to?

Oswald: I'll say so.

Hester (*sentimentally*): Just think of the stories this old coat could tell if it could talk!

Oswald: I'm thinkin'.

Hester (*fishing for information*): Didn't anybody do anything nice for you—over there?

Oswald: Sure! I asked a Y. M. C. A guy for a shot of hooch once, and he gimme a Bible. He was a kind guy!

Hester: You're always joking me. I mean—*women*. Weren't there any especially nice to you?

Oswald: Eh? Oh! Women! Oh there's women enough everywhere. Too many of 'em. Say; it's gettin' warm here.

Hester: Isn't it nice—being here—so warm, and comfy? Do you know it is the first time we have been really alone? Tell me about the war. I love to hear about it.

Oswald (*stretching himself at ease on the couch*): Sometimes, over there, when I'd maybe be settin' up to my waist in ice-water and just cussin' out the whole damn show, I'd think of places warm—and comfy. I'd never had 'em, but I'd read about 'em and heard about 'em—like this. (*Hester in sympathy reaches out her hand to touch his. Carelessly and as though by accident, he moves his hand in time to avoid her outreaching one.*) I'm a poor lot, Hester, I guess. I've hoboed it and dead-beat it all over the darned place. Ever since I was a kid of sixteen I've seen the worst of everything—women and men—and God's made some birds, I'll say! I've gone down the line with wops in Naples—niggers in Port Said. Oh, God, I do know *everything*—every damn thing! If there'd been a kid like you waitin' for me—maybe—Then comes the war. I goes in with a guy named Bill that I picked up over in Chile—a Swede. We gets in the Foreign Legion. God, what a swell bunch! Gee, old Bill was a card! He got his all right. Falls down in the attack right by me. "Come on, Bill," I says; "to hell with 'em!" "I got mine!" he says, and he had. I couldn't stop to do anything. I never saw Bill again. They gimme that junk (*pointing to the medals on his coat*) for what I done that day.

Hester (*laying her cheek against his left arm*): All you've seen and done! And all I haven't. It doesn't seem fair, somehow.

Oswald: You mean you're fed up, sis?

Hester: I can't explain—you wouldn't understand. Something's wrong somewhere. Life is wrong, I guess. (*Bitterly.*) Oh, what does it all matter?

Oswald (*trying her out*): Suppose—just for instance—suppose I told you that I was fed up—you understand what I mean—and wanted some place, warm and comfy, as you say, and somebody who'd help make it so. Somebody who'd want me there. Somebody who'd understand me and stick to me through hell. My kind o' girl—every fellow's got his kind, you know. Suppose I said I'd been homesick for her, just plain nutty—till I got right where I'd got to have her by me—for keeps. *Had* to! Dotty about her. Suppose I said all that, Hester? What would *you* say, sis? (*So great is* Hester's *emotion that she cannot reply.* Oswald *eyes her with amusement and a certain contempt; then he rises.*) You'll know—when I'm gone.

Hester: Oswald! Don't go——

Oswald (*in a cold, matter-of-fact voice*): No; I ain't your kind, sis; do you get me? Hes, lemme give you a tip. You stick to your kid—*he's* hero enough for you.

Hester, utterly at sea, hesitates seeing her poor little dream shattered to bits. At last she rises and, without a backward glance, drags herself hopelessly out of the room and up-stairs. *Oswald* watches her coolly, then pulls the cablegram from his pocket and reads it over again with satisfaction. He pauses and falls into thought, debating within himself whether or not he shall take the money that lies in the drawer before him. Suddenly he conquers the temptation and goes over to the couch. But again temptation assails him and, suddenly yielding, he goes to the secretary, takes the key from the upper drawer, unlocks the lower one, and taking out the bag of money, crowds it into his coat pocket.

Everybody's Magazine, March, 1922

Andrew Lane (Richard Bennett) is bewildered at his brother's antagonism to his well-intentioned suggestions.

(Above) *Oswald* (Robert Ames) has returned from the church meeting, where he related some of his war-experiences. *Marthe* (Fania Marinoff) greets him with: "Let me look at you! Oh, you are so beautiful in your uniform!"

The end that makes it all come right. *Little Andy* (Joseph Depew) is rescued from the schoolhouse fire; but *Andrew Lane* (Richard Bennett) is telling his wife (Alma Delwin) how poor *Oswald* has perished while attempting to rescue another child.

Photographs by White Studio

He hears a gasp from the doorway and, turning, sees *Hester* in her wrapper. She stands rigid with horror, staring at him; and *Marthe*, running into the room, finds them so. Her eyes seek out *Hester* with furious accusation, then travel to *Oswald* for explanation. With a mutter of rage, *Oswald* rises and, pushing between the two women, goes up to his room. *Marthe* regards *Hester* with loathing and anger for a moment and then follows him.

AT EIGHT the next morning, *Hester*, cold with shame and fear, is huddled at the foot of the stairway waiting for *Oswald* to appear. She has been up all night.

Marthe finds her here. They quarrel, and *Marthe* tells *Hester* how things stand between *Oswald* and herself.

Hester's jealous pangs are forgotten almost at once in her anxiety over the money. She believes that *Marthe* knows about the theft.

HESTER: Who planned it? You or he? He did, I suppose. Didn't it mean anything to you that you'd had a home here—kindness — friendship — care? That you could calmly plot together, right under his roof? Knowing what it would mean to us? After having sunk as low as you could with him—you would plan that?

MARTHE: *Mon Dieu!* Plan what?

HESTER: That! (*Pointing toward the secretary.*) You knew what he was going to do. That's why you came down. You have said very wicked things of me this morning. You—you had no right to do so. You ran away from me last night. You wouldn't let me explain. I came down here last night to see if he had enough covers on his couch—it was cold—he was going to sleep here on account of the money. It's true! (MARTHE *sneers.*) When I got to that door—he was—I saw him—*stealing that church money from the drawer!*

MARTHE: *Madame*, I swear to you—as God is my witness—I did not know anything of this—believe me—not anything! It is for me that he has done this. For me! *Madame*—he is not bad. No! No—you shall not hurt him! You shall not!

While the family is at breakfast, *Hester* waits in the sitting-room for *Oswald*. He comes in presently.

HESTER (*tensely*): You've got to give back that money! Right now!

OSWALD: That's what *you* say. What do you care about it?

HESTER: What do I care? We'll be ruined! The disgrace of it to the family! Give it back! Now—this instant!

OSWALD: Well, Andy'll have to pay it.

HESTER: Andy pay it? Why, we haven't got a penny, and you know it.

OSWALD: Oh—he can get it somehow. What's he ever done, anyhow? He didn't go to war, did he? Let him pay, then. I'm a soldier. I'm his brother. Let him pay.

HESTER (*in a fury of anger*): Soldier! You! Andrew pay! Why should he pay for you—and your horrid women? Oh, I know the story of that wretched girl here in this very house—right under our eyes. I got it out of her this morning. How you'd planned to rob us in order to run away and cover up the filthy tracks of your nasty, dirty— Ugh—I can't talk of it!

OSWALD (*insolently*): Go to it Phœbe Snow! You're doing fine! You're all right! You're pure! God, but you're pure! But it's going to cost you money to pay your laundry bill, my little snowflake. Lemme tell you one thing: Your dope on Marty is all wrong. She didn't know anything about that little sum of money I—borrowed, the kid didn't—not a thing.

HESTER: You expect me to believe that? Do you think that I don't know you have to take her away? And why? It's plain enough now. What a fool I was not——

OSWALD: You were a fool all right. That ain't the half of it, dearie! What did you come down here last night for? Afterward? You think I don't know? You haven't got anything on me, young lady.

HESTER: Oh, you coward! You *coward!* Haven't you any pity?

OSWALD: Listen here: You tried to find out last night if there was any other woman. You know why you wanted to know. And then I handed you that "supposin' " stuff. Supposin' you were the goat. And you were all right. God, you were easy! Fell for it like a hired girl for a policeman. When I first came here I thought you were —well, different from the ordinary run of women. You looked like a good girl—married, with one of the finest kids a woman ever had. And then—little by little I began to see how the land lay. Just like 'em all, you are! I tested you out last night.

Just a regular—well, you know. I'm goin' to tell you something. I'm goin' back to France—to my girl. That's where she is, my kind o' girl! She wants me and I want her. And I'm goin' to take this money to do it with. It's the price of that little show you tried to pull off last night. Do you get me?

HESTER (*in utter desolation and remorse*): Oh! Oh! And Marthe! What about her? What are you going to do about her?

OSWALD (*casually*): Marthe? Oh—nothing— Leave her for you and Andy. I've got to. Poor kiddie, I've got to! You can help her out, can't you?

HESTER: Oswald! Oswald! Have some pity on us! For your mother's sake—for little Andy! For Marthe!

OSWALD: You weren't thinkin' of them last night. Cut that sob-stuff out; I've got to go. You understand? *Got to.* (*He gets his hat and coat.*) Think over what I've said, sis. You're up against it. You can't do one damn thing but take your medicine. Say—give my dog to little Andy for me, will you?

LATER in the morning *Andrew* comes in from his trip. *Hester* tries hard to tell him what has happened, but she can't get it out. While they are talking, bells begin to ring loudly. Fire-engines go by and stop somewhere near. Some one calls *Andrew*, and he rushes out of the house, almost colliding with *Marthe*, who comes slowly in, as though in a trance. Disjointedly she tells that there was a fire in the kindergarten. *Hester* is at once in a panic of fear for little *Andy*, but his voice is heard in the hall and he comes in, terrified, followed by his father.

LITTLE ANDY: I ain't hurted, mummy—not a bit. Uncle Oswal' come and got me. The fire got everywhere. Then Uncle Oswal' came. Where's Uncle Oswal'?

With a sob, *Andrew* tells her.

ANDREW: He's gone! The kindergarten. Andy lit a camp-fire, he says, an' it was all afire in no time. Andy was missing, and Oswald run in and got him. An' then he run back again, after another little boy—that's what they say—an' the roof fell in on 'em! O God, it's awful! Burned to death! That's his overcoat there on baby! And he's gone! I—I can't bear it, Hes! He thought I didn't want him here.

HESTER (*gently*): Andrew, listen, dear! Don't abuse yourself like that. You were good to him. Wonderful—I—I—oh, Andrew, Andrew, if I'd only been—as good as you!

ANDREW: Didn't he say—anything—this morning—when he went—about me?

HESTER (*lying bravely*): He said: "Tell Andy—I'm sorry—about last night. He's a good old scout."

ANDREW (*smiling pitifully but happily through his tears*): He said that? Why, that means everything! You don't know what that means to me, Hes. "Good old scout!" That's just like him! Oh, I knew he was all right. Bless him for that!

Hester summons all her courage. Then—

HESTER: Andrew—the money—the collection—the money you—I gave it—to Oswald—to put in the bank.

ANDREW: This morning? (*He hardly comprehends.*) Then it's gone. It's burned. With him! Then we'll have to make it up. That's all.

HESTER: Yes. We'll have to pay it. Oh, Andy, if you knew——

ANDREW: 'Tain't your fault, Hester. Don't you be sorry. Natural enough for you to give it to him to put in the bank for you. Don't fret, honey—'bout that.

HESTER: Oh Andy—Andy—why didn't I understand?

ANDREW: It's all right. We'll get out of it somehow. I'm so darn sorry for you, Hes. I know how you miss all the nice things that other girls have.

HESTER: Andrew—don't!

ANDREW: Well, it's true—an' I don't blame you. Maybe I can borrow a little money somewhere. And there's that money we have been savin' for little Andy's education. It's tough, but it's got to be done.

HESTER: I don't mind, Andrew. I'll help you. Oh, Andy—I'm so—sorry! I'll always love you, Andy.

ANDREW: Why, of course. There doesn't anything matter much, dear, so long as I got you and the boy. Thank God for that!

HESTER: You are a good man, Andrew. Now I know. A good, *good* man!

ANDREW: Me? I'm just old Andy, I am. But Os—Os was a hero!

Next month's play will be "Ambush," by Arthur Richman, a drama of American life acclaimed by both critics and public as a work of conspicuous merit. In April EVERYBODY'S—out March 15th.

Sauce

Although Hoyle Doesn't Mention It, There Is a Game That Might Be Called "Humbling the Arrogant." Have You Ever Felt That You'd Like to Sit In? A Story off the Beaten Track—

By George Allan England

Illustration by Douglas Duer

"I AM very sorry," said Valeska Lee, "but I cannot marry you."

"But," answered Langdon Phillips, "it has been understood for some time that you were going to."

"I know; but—well——"

"Your father," Langdon accused, "is back of this. Just because he wouldn't accept that last lot of structural steel—quibbled over perfectly good materials and raised a lot of absurd objections—and because I used a little plain language in telling him what I thought of him——"

"I don't care to discuss it, please," interrupted Valeska, with a kind of relentless finality.

For a moment Langdon blankly regarded her. Under ordinary circumstances she would have been agreeable to his sight, for Valeska was a thoroughly well-constructed and eupeptic young woman. But now that rebellion gleamed in the sapphires of her eyes and her mouth drew straight with stubbornness, Langdon took no joy of the study. Silence grew heavy between them.

"Very well, then," returned Langdon. Too wise, he, for discussion. In business, yes; in love, never argue. Love's quiver is filled with arrows, not arguments; and just now Langdon's supply of arrows had run low. "Very well, indeed."

"And besides," added Valeska, "no woman can respect a man who fails to overcome difficulties. The way you lost that order from my father proved to me that you were lacking in—well, force of character and——"

"Well, of all the—" Langdon began, but checked himself. After all, one must observe the conventions.

"So you see how it is," concluded Valeska, looking more comely than ever, what of a rather adorable flush that mounted from perked-up chin to shadowing masses of dark, fine hair.

"Yes; I see how it is," agreed Langdon. "Quite so. Good-by."

There was that in the glint of his eye, the flare of his nostril, as he closed the Lee front door just a thought too hard and as he departed for his own bachelor diggings which assured Valeska that all was over between them.

Fate, however, entertained other projects; and it is into these that we must now examine.

Langdon Phillips, craving change of scene, one week later applied for and got the job of going down to Lima to sell structural steel to the Ferrocarriles Nacionales de Peru. He wanted a trek of many parasangs to get him gone from memories. At twenty-five, memories are serious things.

"You're a good man for the job, I think," President Van Ness, of Van Ness Steel, said to him. "I think in time you'll be one of our best go-get-it men. Of course I know you fell down on that Lee matter; but Lee is impossible. He's everything that's captious and overbearing and all that. If you land heavy on this Lima business, you'll more than retrieve yourself. You speak Spanish, don't you?"

"Reasonably well."

"And you're familiar with Latin-American ways?"

"I've lived two years in Cuba and knocked round the Caribbean a good bit. And I've been in Ecuador."

"So much the better. Let's see what you can do."

A FORTNIGHT later, Langdon sailed out of New York harbor on the *General Ramón*, whose first port of call was Havana. About half an hour after Sandy Hook light faded into the shadowy grays of the horizon-line, Langdon ran plump into Severance Lee and his daughter Valeska on the upper starboard deck. Fate sometimes plays little tricks like that.

The Gulf Stream is well known to be warm; but it wasn't warm enough to thaw out the complete chilliness existing between Langdon and the Lees. On the fifth night at sea the bottom dropped out of the barometer, the sky, and—later—the ship. The first two events were due to a hurricane which caused the third event by scraping the *General Ramón* across a sunken barricade of coral.

In the screeching gale, the pitch-blackness and the deluge that flailed the sea, the steamer went to the bottom. Passengers and crew went to various places, according to their past lives or present skill in the boats.

Valeska, her father and Langdon forgot their strained relationship long enough to bundle into a life-boat together. A quartermaster finished the complement of that boat; but he, incautiously standing up, was washed overboard and seen no more.

The two men rowed at random. Valeska steered and bailed. After a goodish while of baddish experiences, a line, darker than the night, loomed ahead. This dark line revealed itself dimly surmounted by palms, some streaming in the hurricane, others whipped bare.

Surf grew swiftly louder. It took them, shot them ashore—but not on agreeable and romantic sand. No; what they struck and spilled on was a mud-flat, deep, sticky, and very black.

It is not agreeable, as the castaways presently discovered, to wallow through muck at three A.M., with a great wind laying down a barrage of horizontal deluges. Severance Lee predicted quicksands; but there were none. The worst that the trio encountered just then was mud two feet deep.

In something over an hour the wind dropped, though the rain continued. The ex-passengers reached more solid land—land, however, still swampy. Their rating was "All in." Langdon was a little more all in than the other two, because he had not only dragged himself but had helped the others also. And Severance Lee weighed well over two hundred.

Land, even though not very solid land, was as welcome as pay-day to Langdon. How his companions felt he didn't know and he didn't care. The trio huddled down in the openwork shelter of a mangrove thicket, and Lee swore. He seemed to be in rather a jellified condition of body and mind. Valeska and Langdon said nothing. Langdon didn't comfort her, and she didn't want him to. They weren't thinking much about one another. Probably Langdon still loved her, but now he had no stomach for romance.

He was wondering about where his personal effects and business affairs had gone, and how the blazes he was ever going to "come back;" also thinking how much he wanted a smoke, and debating whether the matches and tobacco in his pocket could ever be dried out and used. She was pondering her wardrobe, now at the bottom of the Spanish Main; also speculating what she was going to do for hairpins, and rubbing her wrist where Langdon had wrenched it when he had dragged her. None of them offered up thanks to heaven, though Lee talked a lot of Scripture.

Thus time passed, as per usual.

Dawn arrived with broad smears of crimson, gold and pearl; with pink flushes and vermilion-splashed turquoise, evanescent and exquisitely glowing over the enchanted sea. The wind had died, the clouds faded. Nothing remained of the storm but a tremendous surf that slithered up mud-flats in a sinister and vindictive manner.

The scene was furbished out with beauty and romance enough, but it worked no alchemy of admiration in the hearts of the castaways.

Daylight found them cramped and cross. They had already voiced everything they could think of about the wreck and its horror. Of course it was a tragedy, but about all they felt was a sort of peevish relief at being alive. Behind them, a fringe of still-standing palms flopped feather-dustery tops in the breeze; in front, the breakers tumbled their boat in the mud.

THEY couldn't make out any sign of land except their own, or of the steamer's wreckage or of survivors' boats. There was no smudge of smoke on the horizon; nor was there even so much as a Batabanó sponge-fishing schooner.

"This is a devil of a mess!" gloomed Lee. "How are you going to get us out of it?"

"I'm not," answered Langdon. His voice disclosed a new quality from any that Valeska or her father had ever heard in it. He got up, yawned and stretched. A sort of ominous tranquillity lay in his eyes.

"Where are we?" demanded the elder man. He was shivering in his muddy white flannels, quivering with nerves and weakness, like coffee jelly served by a waiter with the palsy.

"On a Cuban key, as you perceive. I inventory mud, water, mangroves, palms and palmettos, swamps and" — with a slap—"bugs."

Lee heaved himself up, his ruddy face a mask of dejection.

"You might at least try to be gentleman enough to tell us where this key is," put in Valeska, filially at her father's side.

"You flatter me, my dear Miss Lee," smiled Langdon. He seemed to have sufficient fortitude to bear up under the troubles afflicting Valeska and her father. "Does the mere fact that I've done a bit of traveling in these parts make me a geographical authority?"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Lee. "You're cool enough about it. You don't think this is a desert island, do you?"

"No. Those sandpipers out on the mud-flats prove that this key supports life. I see some pelicans, too, down by that point to westward. Coconuts are edible. The swamps are likely to contain alligators and other reptiles. Probably we sha'n't starve."

"Please," entreated Valeska, "try to find some fresh water—and start a fire, and get us something to eat. We—we've really got to suspend personalities here."

"By all means," agreed Langdon, while his look fed on her with only qualified approval. He realized that even a striking blonde of impeccable proportions loses a certain charm when her hair hangs loose and when her water-soaked pongee dress is rough-cast with the mud of a Cuban key.

"Got any matches?" asked Lee. "Mine are ruined."

"Ditto," reported Langdon.

"Tobacco?"

"Yes." He produced a tin box, nearly full. "I think this can be dried in the sun."

"Tobacco won't do *me* any good!" exclaimed Valeska, a very mournful light in her eyes. "And I'm so hungry!"

"No doubt," Langdon commiserated. "You only had four meals yesterday, plus tea and biscuits twice."

Valeska shot a swift and angry glance at him. Her father said:

"No use in our quarreling here. Let's get busy. We can't stay here, you know."

"We may have to," opined Langdon.

"We can't!" the girl affirmed. "With my father subject to rheumatism, this damp place——"

"Sh, Valeska," commanded Lee. "Don't swear."

"You two stay here," suggested Langdon in an untroubled voice. He squinted along the mournful shore. "I'll explore. You'd better stick around, right close to where we are. You don't want to get into those swamps back there. And if you wander east along the mud-flats, you may get into quagmires. We'll rendezvous here. I'll strike out westward and see what's what and then report."

"Ah, that's more like!" approved Lee. "You're a good fellow, after all. I *knew* you wouldn't hold a grudge, and——"

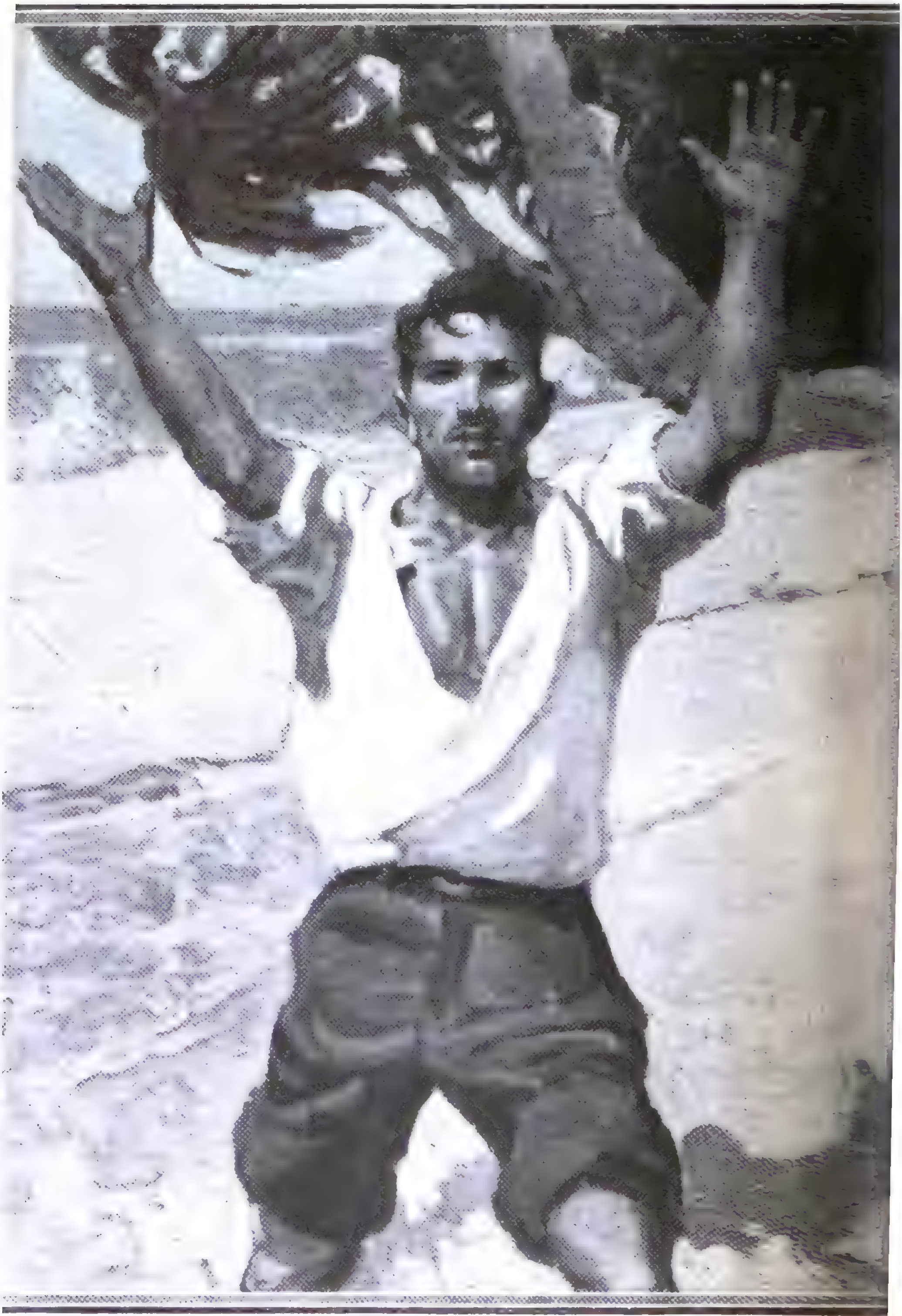
Whack!

Lee's sentence ended in a swat and a vivid objurgation. The young man smiled.

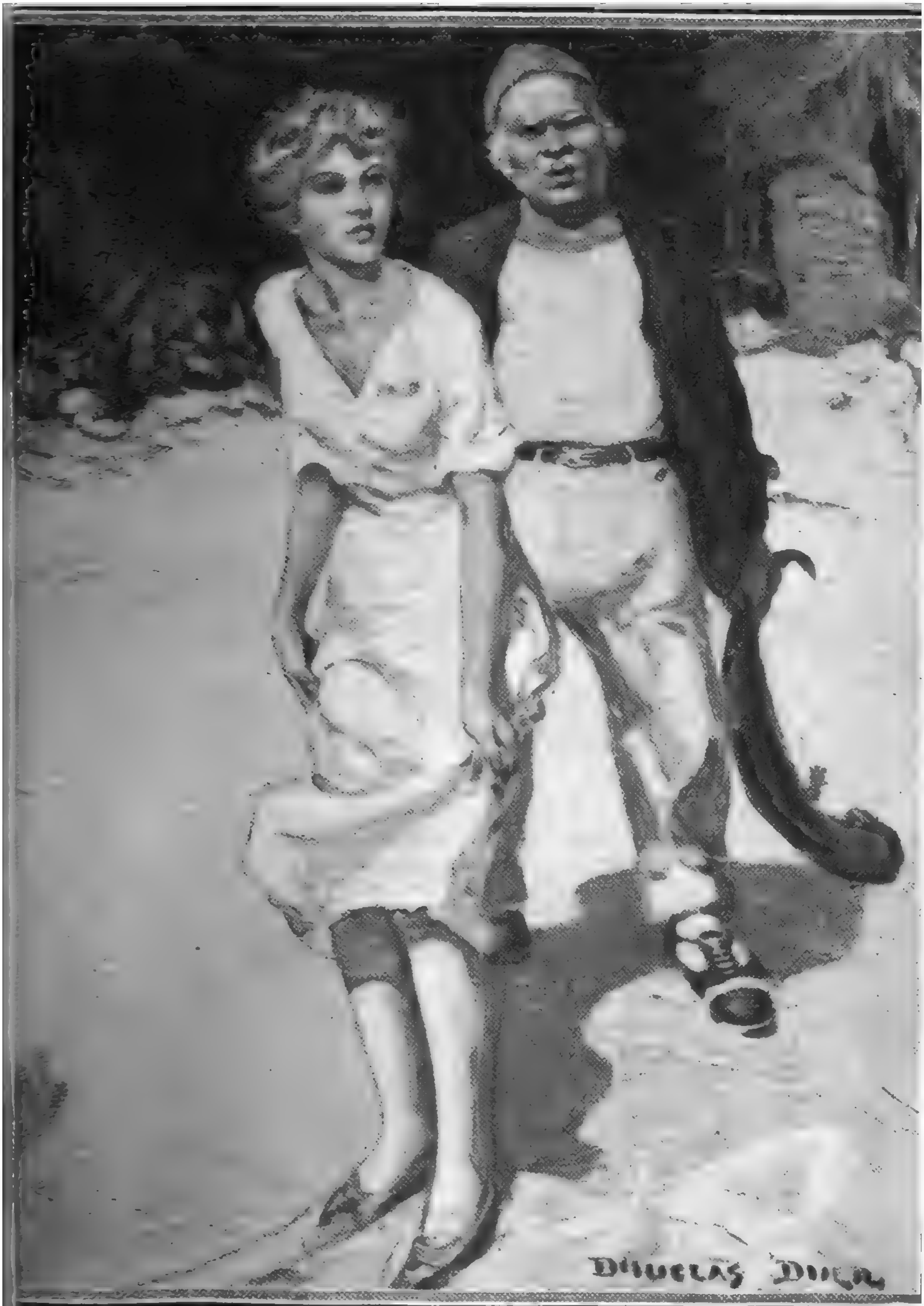
"That's only a hayhenny," he explained. "Hayhennies are little flies. The rising sun is waking 'em up. Their sting isn't dangerous—only painful. Later, they'll swarm in clouds, unless we contrive a smudge."

"I've been bitten several times already," said Valeska, frankly scratching. "Please get busy."

"All right. I'm off. But if you see a jaguar, don't monkey with him. Jaguars are short-tempered. And in case you dig up any scorpions, leave 'em alone—severely alone."



A hail from the approaching small boat nipped further parley. Langdon strode tow


DOUGLAS DUER

the surf. "Isn't he just splendid, father?" Valeska demanded of the dumb-stricken Lee.

"Oh!"—from Valeska.

"Also remember not to use too short a stick if you try to kill any cottonmouth adders. And don't miss your blow. A cottonmouth's bite kills in about seven to ten minutes."

"You—you don't think—" quavered the girl. Her habitual insousciance had considerably vanished in dismay.

"I'll be back as soon as I get a bath and see what the prospects are," Langdon promised.

"Bath?" queried Lee, a bit lorn and anxious-eyed.

"And wash my clothes," the young man added. "This mud on me doesn't make any kind of a hit. By the way, keep out of the sun as much as possible. You might go up under those gum-trees, beyond that green-scummed pool. But look out for ticks on the guinea-grass. They're hard to get off till they've filled themselves with blood. So are the leeches in these pools. And don't poke any floating logs. Logs *may* be alligators. Well, so long!"

"Here—wait!" entreated Lee. "We'll go along, too."

"No. I usually bathe in private. Good-by." Langdon walked away.

"How long before you'll be back?" was Lee's final shout.

Langdon only laughed.

HIS way led along a soggy foreshore, patched with arsenical puddles and mangrove tangles on tarantula-legged roots. Inland, red-barked gums writhed fantastic limbs, coco-palms curved graciously aloft, and royal palms' gray boles soared to their feathery green explosion sixty feet in air.

"Fat chance to cross this island," said Langdon, "unless you knew the way. If you didn't, you wouldn't get a hundred yards." With approval, he eyed the palms. "Plenty of nuts and palmiche, wonderfully fattening for hogs. Old Lee will like 'em. Sea-grapes, too."

He stopped to look at a gnarled sea-grape tree with broad dull-green leaves, red-veined.

"There are black coruas, too," he added, as a swift flight of birds flickered across the sun. "With all these luxuries and probably ajutias—nearly as good eating as muskrat—and with pelicans' and turtles' eggs and iguanas, we'll live high."

And Langdon continued his fly-pestered way along the shore.

The ever-rising sun painted a picture of rare wonder on the sea—a picture almost as beautiful as a colored lantern-slide. But Langdon didn't care. He pushed on, minding no thorns that hooked, no branches that caught. A log with bumps on it in a pool emitted a puffing grunt and sank among sword-grasses with a grin of yellow teeth. Langdon picked up a driftwood club and continued westward.

Presently the swamps ended in a stretch of pitted gray coral that lay hot under the sun, its lower reaches bombarded by surf that exploded in glittering brine-dust, its upper edges fading into thickets of saw-toothed palmettos nearly impossible to get through. In pot-holes of this coral dwelt tiny shrimps and blister-shaped "sea-beef."

Like a petrified sponge, this coral strip extended half a mile. Walking over it was abominably hard, for the spikes stabbed like knives. Langdon rejoiced when he found a splendid curve of beach beyond it.

"This," judged Langdon, "is a little bit of all right." And he smiled as he plowed along the beach with breakfast on his mind and hayhennies on his neck. All down the sands lay tossed a litter of storm-flung palm branches, nuts and husks, driftwood, conch-shells and windrows of yellow gulf-weed. Afar, buzzards soared away, stiff-winged against the azure. And an occasional serpentine trail cut the sands.

"Iguana steak," Langdon remarked, "is excellent when properly grilled over a driftwood fire. We are decidedly getting on."

After shucking along some minutes through the sand, with the sun now beginning to cook his brains, he heard a trickle of water from a palm thicket on some slightly rising ground. This trickle proceeded from a tiny spring that, after dallying in a couple of clear pools, overflowed onto the beach and was there absorbed.

Langdon didn't seem much surprised at finding the spring. You might almost have thought he knew it was there. He drank in the upper pool and washed himself and his clothes in the lower one. He put his tobacco on a driftwood board in the sun to dry out, which it did very speedily. So did he.

Waiting for this process to end, he inspected his papers, money and watch, all damaged by sea water. The watch had stopped at two-forty-seven, the hour when they had been spilled into the surf. Langdon cranked up the watch, but the motor remained stalled.

"Well, never mind. Time has no value here."

A few minutes later, clean and rough-dried, he took his stick and once more pushed on along the beach westward. After rounding a point and continuing about a mile, he turned into the palmetto thicket, and in their fastnesses he completely vanished.

Mr. Severance Lee and Miss Valeska Lee, far back to the east, near the mud-flats, were meantime gathering coconuts and trembling for fear of varmints.

"Where the devil has that fellow gone, anyhow?" Lee now and then testily demanded. Had he but known, this story could never have been written.

SOMETHING over two hours and a half later, Langdon reappeared to the distressed Lees. Clean, well fed and smoking his pipe in a genially debonair manner, he sauntered up and paused to observe father and daughter—both of them still hungry, muddy and vexed by flies and fears.

At first they didn't see Langdon. Valeska was kneeling beside a palm log, and if a woman's face is an open book, hers now looked like the Book of Lamentations. She was holding a coconut on the log with her hands, and her father was hammering the coconut with a stick. The nut, seclusively lurking in its thick husk, didn't seem to mind in the least. Two or three broken sticks lay nigh.

"Oh, there you are!" remarked Langdon lightly, and blew smoke that wafted athwart the other man's quivering nostrils. "Busy eh?"

"Why, bless my soul!" ejaculated Lee. His irritation of fear, bug-bites, humidity, heat and hunger blended with unconcealed relief. "My dear fellow, I'm glad to see you back!"

Valeska, however, turned and gazed away over the vacant mud, past the capsized boat and out to the empty sea. Her look was the only chilly thing within hundreds of miles.

"Too bad you haven't got an ax," commiserated Langdon.

"Where have you been?" demanded the other, while the clear pink of Valeska's cheek—only partly obscured by mud—flushed angrily. "We thought you were lost."

"Nothing at all like that. I've just been cleaning up, eating a first-class breakfast and having a good smoke." His eyes were not without malice.

"Breakfast! Where did *you* find breakfast?"

"Oh, there's no end of things to eat on this island. And I've found a peach of a spring."

"Water?" exclaimed Valeska, whose interest in the horizon suddenly departed. Her eyes, bluer than that horizon's self, searched his already sunburned face. "Please show me where. I'm about choked."

"And fire?" Lee added. "Why, you—you're smoking!"

"How observant you are, Mr. Lee!" His voice was serene.

"Where in hades did you get fire?"

"Not in hades at all. A tropical sun, with a scientific adjustment of watch-crystal and plenty of fine-scraped tinder *might* work miracles. What are your plans for the day?"

"Well, of all things!" ejaculated the girl on a note of keen indignation. "Aren't you going to help us? You might at least have brought us something to eat. And you might give my father some tobacco. I know by his symptoms he's dying for a smoke."

"Men have died and the worms have eaten them, but not for—tobacco," affirmed Langdon. "Any more than for love. Have I refused to——"

"There, there, Val!" put in her father. "No argument."

"You can come with me any time you like," offered Langdon.

"We'll go right away," the girl decided. "There'll be plenty of time after that to get the boat."

"What boat?"

"Why, our boat, of course," Lee explained. "We've decided to float it at high tide. I'm dead certain we can locate the oars somewhere out there in the mud."

"Yes; I'm sure you can," Langdon agreed, something very like a quiver of enjoyment through the restraint of his tone. He forced his eyes away, lest his fellow sufferers should read anything there. "It'll be a messy job, of course, but a little more mud won't matter. I'll watch you with interest."

"What, sir?" Lee demanded. "Dash it all, you won't help?"

"No. I'm remaining here, thanks." He puffed a contented pipe. "I'm not going to take my chances rowing an open boat without knowing where to row to, or how far. And I'm not going to wallow in that muck, either, under a blistering sun."

"What!" exclaimed Valeska, with a swift blue look of anger.

"Fact," asseverated Langdon. "I'm going to take a vacation. Need one from trying to sell structural steel to people that don't know enough to buy the best at rock-bottom prices."

"Well, I'll be damned!" exploded Lee.

"Not just yet, I hope."

"Brute!" Valeska snapped in.

"Guess I'll be getting along," judged Langdon. "It's too muddy round here. I prefer my camp in the grove. Call any time you like—and mighty welcome."

He concluded with a note of real cordiality, turned and walked away. Angry glints sparkled in Valeska's eyes. Old Lee stared, then hoarsely shouted:

"Here, here! Wait!"

"Well?" asked Langdon, turning.

"We're going, too."

"Oh, fine! Delighted, I'm sure."

IN SILENCE, and darkly pondering, the soul-harried father and daughter followed Langdon. Vanished now was Severance Lee's cock-sure, domineering way, vanished the immaculateness, the aloofness of Valeska. Mud, heat, flies, hunger and thirst are champion pacifiers, and so, too, are weakness, anxiety and the realization that unknown evils impend.

Few words passed as the trio plowed through the mangroves, crossed the coral and came to the beach. Far ahead, in the heat-shimmer, a waft of curling smoke enheartened the Lees. Their host walked to windward of Severance, letting tobacco aromas blow upon him. Presently the old fellow burst out,

"Stop smoking, for heaven's sake, or give me some!"

"Certainly. Why didn't you ask sooner? Got a pipe? No? Too bad. Well, I've got an extra, if you don't mind."

Lee put out a hand of eagerness. Langdon fished another pipe from his pocket and passed it over.

"Only hard rubber," he apologized.

"'S all right. No man should look a gift pipe in the mouthpiece." He filled from Langdon's box.

"Oh," explained Langdon, "it isn't a gift pipe at all. The tobacco isn't a gift, either." He puffed his own pipe to a glow. "Here; I'll scrape a little fire into your pipe—so. All right?"

Lee accepted, and drew his tobacco alive. His mood wasn't for argument just then. But Valeska, her cheeks burning, asked:

"What do you mean, Mr. Phillips? You—you're *selling* this pipe and tobacco to my father?"

"Certainly," affirmed Langdon. "I've only got part of a box. It's immensely valuable. Why shouldn't he pay for it?"

"But, bless my soul," Lee now rallied, "this is a bit irregular, isn't it? Tobacco is usually exchanged gratis between gentlemen."

"True. But I've gone into trade. If I can't sell steel, maybe I can sell tobacco."

Valeska's full lip whitened under the pressure of her teeth. Her father's indignant hand slid into his pocket.

"I'll soon settle *this!*" he cried corrosively.

Langdon's hand came up with negation.

"No money!" he exclaimed. "Money's not worth anything here."

Lee began to bubble, like a geyser getting ready to erupt.

"Father, be calm!" exhorted the girl.

"How the devil am I going to pay you, if——"

"In services. Such as tending the fire, or——"

"Oh, well, *that's* all right," Lee assented. "Pardon me, my dear fellow, for misunderstanding you. Why didn't you say so at first? Of course I expect to cooperate."

"So do I," said the girl.

"All right; nothing more to be said, is there?" asked Langdon, with a smile that showed good teeth. "Let's forget it."

In silence they pushed forward again. Sandpipers flitted along the surf. Far aloft, against the storm-washed sky, a frigate-bird hovered to rob some other bird. Morning smiled, and so now did Severance Lee; for—lo!—he had tobacco.

"Right as rain," he presently affirmed.

"Of course we'll help." He nodded with great willingness.

After a while the castaways reached the palm grove of the pools under the flooding golden sunshine. Here, on the sand, a cheery fire blazed. A ship's knee, sand-polished, made a fireplace of sorts. Driftwood lay near. The smoke, which harbingered cookery, smelled savory.

"Great!" approved Lee. "Valeska can keep the fire and we'll both get wood."

"No," Langdon vetoed. "I'll look out for the fire myself. That's easier than dragging up wood. You two can be the wood-getters."

"What?"

"How do you like my spring?" asked Langdon, avoiding argument.

"Oh, splendid!" Father and daughter hastened to kneel and to drink. Then they came back to the fire. "Well now," asked Lee, "got anything to eat?"

"Sorry, but I haven't. I buried all the odds and ends left from my breakfast."

"What? You didn't save anything for us?" demanded Valeska.

"There wasn't much to save. But this island has resources."

"Well, all right," said Lee. "First we'll wash up, and then find some chow, and then put up a signal of distress in a palm."

"And then float the boat," added Valeska, not looking at Langdon.

"I—I don't know, my dear," hesitated Lee. "That'll be an awful job in this heat. Maybe our best scheme will be to stay right here and be rescued."

"We're liable to stay weeks—months," Langdon cheerfully assured them.

"You think we're off the steamer-track?"

"Entirely derailed, I should say."

"And this island is uninhabited?"

"Not now. There are at least three Americans on it."

"Yes—but others?"

"Well"—Langdon smiled—"you can explore if you want to. Mud-flats to east and west. Behind us, swamps."

"Humph!" Lee grunted.

"Let's take a walk," suggested Langdon. "Miss Lee can wash up. We'll go round that point for an hour or two and make ourselves some hats. You can gather driftwood, dig turtles' eggs and maybe catch an iguana. Then, later, you can bathe and do your laundry."

"Oh, I can, can I?" Lee demanded. "Say, you've got it all doped out for me, haven't you? Entire program—what?"

"Just so. Come; let's be on our way."

Lee hesitated, standing there in muddy clothes and an evil temper, but he had to yield.

"Kindly observe"—Langdon smiled to Valeska—"that I have two pools. The upper one is my drinking-pool."

The girl made no answer, but her mouth went very tight. She turned her pretty back on Langdon, who beckoned Lee. Both men moved down to the beach and started along it westward.

Discretion bids us follow them, leaving the girl to her own devices—and the hay-hennies.

WHEN the grove of the pools had completely hidden the indignant Valeska, not for her indignation any less pulchritudinous, Lee slacked his pace.

"See here, Langdon," he sharply began; "don't carry a joke too far!"

"What joke?"

"About making us do all the work."

"No joke at all. You're going to use my water and my fire, aren't you? They're my capital, and it's only fair that you should pay interest."

"Well, say! If the fool-killer landed here, you'd have to hunt cover." Veins began to stick out on Lee's brow. He clenched a bad fist. Langdon answered, unmoved:

"We won't argue it. If you don't like the arrangement, go get a pool of your own and make fire."

Lee halted, stagnant with ireful amaze. But Langdon kept right on. The other had to follow. Sweaty, mud-caked, rubicund, he panted along. Betimes he swatted the flies. Soon he overtook Langdon.

"Look here—" he began, but Langdon interrupted with:

"We've got to make hats first. We can't risk sunstroke."

"Hats?"

"It's easy. I'll show you. I used to do it when I lived down this way."

He turned into the fringe of palms along the beach. Lee followed. Langdon chose a large coconut and sat down in the shade. The other man sat down, too.

Fifteen minutes' time and the deft use of his pocket-knife put Langdon in possession of a candle-extinguisher creation that he pulled down over his head.

"There," he demanded; "how's that? Pretty nifty, eh?"

"Not too bad," admitted Lee, and blotted his brow with a sleeve. "You're quite a Robinson Crusoe, eh? Make me one, will you?"

"You'd learn more about the structural strength of coconut fiber if you made it yourself. Its tensile coefficient is almost that of, say, structural steel. Better make your own hat."

"All right. Give me your knife."

"No. But I'll rent it to you."

"*Rent* it?" And Lee reddened ominously.

"I'm telling you, I'll rent it for one stick of fire-wood per minute of use. One hour, sixty sticks. Fair, eh?"

Lee made a kind of noise, swallowed hard and reached for the knife.

"All—right," he agreed. "I'm glad we're on a business footing, anyhow. I'd rather accept a bunch of roses from a leper, sir, than any favors from *you!*"

Thus Severance Lee began his labors.

LANGDON kept time on him, estimating the minutes while Lee toiled with an obdurate husk, like a modern prodigal son. Half an hour had passed before Lee had fashioned himself something like a hat. Then he snicked the blade shut, flung the knife at its owner's feet, and rammed the hat on his own blistering, fly-ravaged cranium. His blinking eyes looked murder.

"There's your damned knife!" he exclaimed.

"So I see. You owe me about twenty-five sticks of wood—remember."

"You've got me in a jam now, but I'll have the last laugh on you, Langdon, in spite of hell and high tide!" Lee's vehemence was really excessive for that climate. "When we get back to New York, I'll hound you out of every club you belong to, and blacklist you in every business office where I've got an ounce of weight."

"That's a serious threat," admitted Langdon, "when I consider how many ounces you weigh. But you won't weigh so many by the time you get back. And maybe you won't *ever* get back. Now, don't you think you'd better rent this knife some more and make a hat for your daughter?"

Lee told Langdon where he could go.

"Oh, can I?" asked Langdon, smiling. "How does one get there from here? Nice and chatty, aren't you?"

But already Lee was on foot, plowing through the sand.

"I suppose you know best," remarked Langdon, as he picked up the knife, "whether or not a young woman with a wealth of hair like your daughter's needs a hat."

Lee snapped around.

"Don't discuss her!" he commanded.

"Oh, all right." And Langdon rose. "Now you can find lunch for me."

"*What?*"

"For all three of us, rather," Langdon added contemplatively.

"You—damn you, sir, d'you think I'm going to——"

"Certainly—unless you find water and fire of your own. I'm going to take a good long rest down here on this island. Going to have some of the leisure that makes a man like one of the immortals. And every day I'll plan out your work. So——"

"Why, you—why—" And Lee grew purple.

"Every day there'll be something for you," Langdon inexorably continued. "I never put off till to-morrow the man I can do to-day. And——"

"Why, sir, if you think I—I'm going to be your slave——"

"Suit yourself," Langdon smiled indifferently. "Only, remember you already owe me a dozen turtles' eggs for that pipe and tobacco, and thirty sticks of wood for the use of my knife. Also, one iguana for the water you and your daughter have already used."

Lee could only stare. He turned all colors. His lips quivered, but fumbled in vain for words.

"My rates will be reasonable," affirmed Langdon, "but will be strictly enforced."

The other glared at him like a trapped wolf. The implacable exactions of life had him in jaws of steel. Langdon, once anvil for his blows, had now become hammer to smite him. On the principle that the future belongs to him who knows how to wait, Langdon sat down again in the shade and began humming a tune.

"If I don't make you smart for this, young man!" Lee sputtered. "Why, I—I'll——"

"There's no meat on the bone of contention," said Langdon. "If you don't like my way of doing business, roll your own hoop any way you see fit. But don't bother *me!*"

The older man advanced with clenched fist. But Langdon held out a stick to him.

"Here; you'll need this," he suggested, "to dig turtles' eggs and kill iguanas."

Then Lee burst into a raw jangle of laughter. When a man laughs just that way, his nerves are frayed pretty raw.

"You've got me—for now," he admitted. "The Chinese say, 'Bow before even a wicked monkey when he's in power.' I'm not a fool. Give me that stick!"

"I'll rent it to you for one egg a day," smiled Langdon, his sunburned face engagingly unmoved. "Better get busy. The longer you chew the rag the longer it'll be before you chew anything else. The eggs are likely to be anywhere along the upper slopes of the beach. You just have to dig—that's all. And as for iguanas, you merely have to follow these trails in the sand."

Lee nodded. Even Vesuvius cannot spout lava to the moon.

"Better get busy," Langdon suggested. "Your daughter will be expecting something to cook, and we've got to keep her smiling. Besides, I want to test her culinary skill."

"What? She—you—she's got to cook for *you?*"

"For all hands. I advise you to get a move on."

Silent, dazed by developments and by the heat—external, internal and infernal—Lee turned his anguished face away.

"Lead on, Macduff!" commanded Langdon.

Broken to harness, Lee plodded along the beach. His muddy white flannels bagged preposterously, like the hide of a sacred Siamese elephant, as he slid and shambled.

But Langdon looked comfortable, well fed and clean. The little air he was humming drifted on the tropic air with a harmony that proclaimed a perfect peace of mind. The words that fitted its notes were:

I've got my captain working for me now.

TWO hours have sped away.

The cooking sun, now doing what cooking usually does—approaching mealtime—disclosed Valeska very much bathed and laundered, and with her masses of hair twisted up most fetchingly. That hair was held by palm-leaf splinters in lieu of the usual pins. Valeska looked as pretty as it was humanly possible to look under the circumstances, which was very pretty indeed—deliciously fresh and fair. It is a singular anomaly that woman, the fairest creature in the world, is also the unfairest. But this is a mere digression.

Any slight deficiency of color that Valeska's cheek may have suffered through a total loss of her vanity case was vastly more than compensated by the flame that now burned in her face as she stood there in the sunlight-dappled edge of the grove, looking with indignant eyes at:

Item: One young man, clean, calm and unburdened, sauntering along the beach in care-free fashion; and,

Item: One distressed father, grim, grimed, sweating and toilsome, with bulging pockets; his right arm heaped with driftwood sticks, his left hand dragging a four-foot lizard.

This lizard, which Lee was hauling by the tail, had formidable jaws, crooked legs and puffy throat. It was mottled, also decorated with improbable frills, spines and crests.

"Oh!" formed the limit of Valeska's speech. Then her eyes flamed. They would have shriveled Langdon had that nonchalant young man been shrivelable. He wasn't, though. He only smiled as he followed Lee to the fire. There Lee flopped his burdens into the shaded sand.

"Lunch is here," announced the young man, his eyes cheery under the fringes of his coconut-husk hat.

"This infernal ruffian," Lee exploded, "is going to make slaves of us, and——"

"Father, be calm!" adjured the girl, her bonny face ablaze. She flung at Langdon, "Shame on you, to make an old man——"

"Not so old as you think," cheerfully affirmed Langdon, refilling his pipe. He lighted it with a bit of burning driftwood. "Not by a long shot!"

Lee flung off his husk hat and smeared his brow with a hand that trembled. Then he staggered toward the pool.

"You contemptible brute!" Valeska hurled at Langdon, who merely continued:

"Your father's pretty spry. Really, he is. He's already—puff, puff—collected enough things for twenty-four hours. Though I guess I'll have him gather a few more nuts."

"Beast!"

"He's got enough wood here to cook several meals. He's earned four and a half hours' use of my fire. He's got an hour's use of my knife to his credit, and another pipeful of tobacco. One iguana buys a lot, you know. We've got a regular schedule of prices, including water and everything. It's kind of complicated, but we'll soon have it worked out and memorized. Great idea, eh?"

"Do you dare to stand there, Langdon Phillips, and tell me you—you made my father——"

"I didn't *make* him do a darned thing—really I didn't! He chose to on a business basis—that's all. Business is business."

"Stop, Valeska!" commanded Lee, returning from the pool. His parched throat could now articulate. "This scoundrel's got us in wrong and he means to roughhouse us to the limit. If I only had a knife and some matches of my own——"

"Yes; but you haven't." Langdon smiled sweetly. "That's just the point. Everybody'd be a capitalist if they had the capital. Sure thing!"

"See here," offered Lee; "will you sell me some fire?"

"What for? What's the matter with *my* fire? Perfectly good fire, isn't it? No, I won't. If I did, you'd set up your own establishment right off. You might find water, and mess along some way. Nothing doing. This fire's my best investment. D'you think I'm going to part with my capital and have to go to work for myself? I should say not!"

The girl choked back a Niagara of denunciations that seethed to plunge over the chasm of her rage. Langdon thought her high color, glinting eyes and widened nostrils made an admirable picture. Regretfully he turned away from her to her father.

"You'd better unload those turtles' eggs from your pockets," he advised, "before you break 'em."

Lee knelt. With hands that trembled he laid the blunt eggs in the sand.

"They're not prime quality, and neither is the wood," judged Langdon, inspecting them. "But as there's no other offering in the market, I've got to take 'em—subject to deductions. This isn't like the steel business, where one can pick and choose. I've got to be satisfied with what I can get. That's where you have the advantage of me. I don't think much of that iguana, either; but it'll have to do."

"Father," burst out the girl, "are you going to let this man insult you?"

"What can I do, child?" asked Lee helplessly. "He's going to have his pound of flesh."

"You could spare several," affirmed Langdon, "to your great advantage."

"He's going to carve it out of me with his knife, his fire, his water and his damned tobacco-box!"

"Never!" cried Valeska, flushed with defiance. "We'll starve first!"

"Yes, but—dash it, Val—how about the tobacco? That's where he's got me. Thing is, I can't—that is, I'd hate to have to get along without a smoke now and then. We—that is, I am in this fantastic idiot's power, and——"

"Let me suggest, my dear Miss Lee," put in Langdon, "that you now stroll along the beach while your father uses my bathing-pool and gets the iguana ready for dinner."

"What!" ejaculated Lee. "D'you mean to say that *I* have got to dress that lizard?"

"Certainly—with my knife."

Lee sat down weakly on a palm log. He looked a black picture of despair.

"Your manners and the wool of a blue dog would make a good pair," he commented. "Give me a smoke!"

Langdon glanced over his supplies and seemed to be performing a little mental arithmetic.

"There's nothing really coming to you," he announced, "but I'll advance you credit."

"I'd like to advance my fist against your jaw! No matter, though; give me a smoke, anyhow."

Langdon measured out a reasonable pipeful into the other's trembling hand. Lee's eagerness as he lighted up was almost indecent.

OUTRAGED to her deepest soul, with tears ready to swim, with banners of shame flying in her cheeks—shame for her father's degradation and abasement—Valeska walked away. Langdon watched her with an eye that nearly softened. For a moment he appeared weakening, seemed about to start after her. The minute throbbed with possibilities. But almost at once Langdon pulled himself together. He remained adamant.

He watched her till she had passed down to the beach and vanished. Then he turned to his enslaved factotum.

"It's time for you to begin getting that iguana ready," said he. "I'm devilish hungry. Get busy now!"

SOMETHING almost like peace descended on the little encampment under the palms as dinner drew to its close. The human heart is inescapably blandished by roasted turtles' eggs, grilled iguana steak and sweet coconut milk quaffed through holes drilled with a knife in the shells.

Tobacco added the culminant touch. Even Valeska, not in on the tobacco, began to feel more at peace with all the world—except Langdon Phillips.

Now the girl was sitting on a log near the fire, on which her father, at Langdon's command, had heaped wet gulfweed to smudge the hayhennies away. The men, lulled by heat, by the gossip of the brook, by digestion and nicotine, lay in the warm sand, squinting out at the sailless and rolling immensities of a sea pure turquoise as a porcelain tub full of bluing-water on a Monday morn. They drowsed, and so did noontide.

"Quite like the Garden of Eden, eh?" remarked Langdon lazily. "Palms, beach and sea will feed us. Nothing to do but take the goods the gods provide us. Cinch!"

"I suppose my daughter and I can stand it," inertly answered Lee, "till I fly a distress-signal from a tree or launch that boat."

"Still set on that plan, are you?"

"Why, yes. I imagine you'll help, rather than let a young woman wallow in the mud."

"Certainly I'll help—for a consideration."

"What?"

"I'll help you," offered Langdon, "at the rate of, let's see now, three iguanas per hour or five dozen eggs."

"Father," exclaimed the girl, twisting her hands together, "we don't need his old help! Mud! What do I care for mud? Before I'll let him humiliate you any more, I'll wallow in mud to my knees."

"It's deeper than that in spots," judged Langdon.

"Well, that's our business. We'll launch our boat without any of your help, thank you!"

"*Your* boat?" the young man smiled, pipe in hand. "How very interesting!"

"What's that you say?" Lee demanded.

"There are three of us," Langdon maintained. "One-third of that boat belongs to me."

"Well, by—hm—that is—why, that's preposterous!"

"Not at all. It's just a matter of fact."

"Shylock!" Valeska flung at him.

"I may decide to use my one-third of that boat for fire-wood," continued Langdon, unmoved, "or build a bungalow out of it or something. Take your two-thirds and welcome, but respect property rights and the law."

The elder man choked out,

"How—how much will you sell your share of the boat for?"

"How much will you sell me your steel business for?"

Lee emitted a red remark and struggled up like an indignant behemoth out of the sand. He tramped down to the beach, stripped off his silken shirt and surveyed the palm trees.

"Mr. Phillips," ventured the girl, afraid, "please show a little humanity. Please help my father now."

"Certainly, my dear Miss Lee. Help him, how?"

"Climb a tree for him. If he tries it, he'll fall and maybe kill himself." She got up, stood before him, entreated. He, too, rose. His eyes slid over her face, then lowered, lest she read his thoughts.

"I don't think he'll kill himself," said Langdon. "He can't climb six feet."

Valeska flounced out of the grove.

"Give me that shirt, father! *I'll* climb it—the tree, I mean!"

But she didn't. Young women of gentle breeding cannot climb palm trees. It isn't done. Valeska and her father compromised by driving a ten-foot branch of a gum-tree into the sand, with the shirt tied to the upper end.

"Low visibility," commented Langdon, strolling down to inspect this signal. "A keen eye at a telescope might possibly see this half a mile off shore.

Neither father nor daughter vouchsafed any answer. They anodyned their misery with the reflection that, at all events, they had a signal flying. Back in the grove they kept severely on the other side of the fire from Langdon, once in a while putting on another stick or a little more weed. About three o'clock, Lee's *hop yen* for tobacco broke down his pride, and he had to ask for another smoke.

Langdon, however, had tightened credits, and now insisted on a strictly C. O. D. business. So Lee had to go egging again.

Valeska helped dig. Langdon didn't seem to mind. He continued to chew the lotus-cud of an unshakable content. But after the Lees had earned a pipeful of tobacco, he remarked casually,

"If you're going to build your hut, it's about time you were beginning."

"Hut?" demanded Lee, who itched with hayhenny bites as well as for battle.

"Sure thing! Though, of course, if you prefer to sleep in the open——"

"What we prefer is our own business, sir!"

"Oh, all right. But with tarantulas and bats and bugs and snakes and everything floating round at night, *I'm* going to knock together a little shack of palm branches."

Langdon got up, tipped a log over on to the fire and wandered away to the beach. In about three hours, with daylight fading into a welter of chromatics, he returned. In the grove he saw a rough shelter had been thrown together.

"It'll do," he commented. "Not very good work, but since it isn't for my use, I should worry. Now you can get supper."

Without any argument, though ruefully enough, Valeska and her father obeyed. The menu rioted through eggs and nuts, sea-grapes and water. After this Lucullian orgy, the men smoked, and Lee used up all his remaining egg-credits.

Night drew down, as lovely as those pictures painted on glass and sold in the basements of department stores for $1.79 (with frame). A majestically cosmic loneliness closed its hand about the shipwrecked trio. The fire burned low, grew filmed with ash, under which coals glowed like angers unavenged. Langdon directed his peon to drag up a timber from near the surf, and supervised arranging it so that the fire should last all night. One is careful of one's capital. At last he remarked:

"Well, I'll toddle along now. We've got a hard day ahead of us to-morrow. That is, you have, Mr. Lee. I'm going to have you try and bag a 'gator. Good night, both."

Valeska didn't even know he existed. But her father hesitated,

"See here, now! If you—that is, the wild beasts and things, you know——"

"Well?"

"I mean, if you wouldn't mind—you understand—camping in the immediate vicinity——"

"No. The conventions demand my absence."

Langdon picked up a fiery stick that glowed and trailed sparks as he departed. Its wavering light made shadows prance grotesquely. It diminished as Langdon turned up the beach; it flickered eerily between the peristyled pillars of the grove.

"Wait!" Lee hailed. "I don't ask it for my own sake, but for my——"

"Father!" protested the girl. "Before I'd ask that brute to protect me, I'd let all the alligators and tarantulas and bugs in the world eat me!"

"Impossible, my child," said Lee. "They aren't all here."

Langdon, meantime, faded away. Night received him.

Four times between then and morning a figure dim in the moonlight returned noiselessly along the beach; for where the heart inclines the feet lead. That figure looked, listened, to make sure all was well in the little grove where the camp-fire flickered blue and green with driftwood hues.

Of this, however, Severance Lee and his daughter Valeska knew nothing.

Meanwhile, other things were happening.

OF THESE, one was that Mr. Lee woke with twinges of rheumatism, which bade him be gone from there, to get off that key and stay off. Another was that an early-morning walk revealed to the girl the horrific fact that the boat had vanished. It had probably sunk in the mud or had floated away.

When Langdon returned to the grove, looking ill-slept but cheerful, Lee greeted him with some medium-bad language and Valeska with a cold white silence. But Langdon only smiled.

"Boat? What d'*you* care? You'd given

up thinking of using it, anyhow. Even if you two could get away in a small boat, you'd be wrecked or starved. This is a good, safe island. There's wood enough to keep you busy for weeks and weeks. Food is plentiful, even though not much varied. Why worry?"

Langdon didn't—that day or the next. Nor yet again three days more on top of those. On the contrary, he dwelt contentedly in his Castle of Indolence, doing rather less than nothing, except rent out his fire, his pools, his knife and—till it ended—his tobacco.

Lee's temper, had it struck in, would have poisoned him to death. But Langdon kept the steel man sweating it out. The day that Lee brought in a corua and two ajutias he probably lost five pounds—which considerably improved his figure. His beard got salt-and-peppery and his hands deep-grimed; but his rheumatism faded. Most of it had only been bad circulation, anyhow, and grouch and nerves.

Valeska? Oh, yes; she seemed to be limbering up a good deal. Exercise didn't appear to be doing her any irreparable injury. And wind and sun, painting out her rather hothouse complexion, substituted colors which—once her nose should have quite done peeling—would vastly improve her. That open-throated effect is always becoming, with the tanned collar-bones to match the brown arms.

Valeska and her father, however, warmed up to Langdon about as much as a couple of Bolsheviks would warm up to a soap salesman. They favored him with looks that would have made a more impressionable young man shrink.

But Langdon wasn't the shrinking kind.

IT WAS on the seventh afternoon, when daddy'd gone a-hunting, that Valeska's dam broke, in the grove.

"Mr. Phillips," she began, with hands clenched, "I have something very important to say to you."

"Delighted, I'm sure."

"Sit down on that log and listen to me."

He sat down. She sat down.

"Well?" he asked. He looked at her, in the golden-checkered play of sun and shade, and very lovely, most desirable she was.

"I—oh—I'd die of mortification if father could hear me. Are you quite sure he's out of the way?"

"Positive. And incidentally, Miss Lee, I'm surprised at his having left us together. He usually makes you go with him."

"I made him leave me on purpose. That story about my ankle being turned was just a—story. I fibbed, so that I could stay behind and talk with you."

"Well?" He held his voice steady. He was thinking, "Lord, but isn't she a particular peach, though, when she blushes like that?"

Silence.

"Well?" he repeated.

"Mr. Phillips—Langdon—this can't go on."

"Why not?"

"It's got to end, even if I—" She plucked at her skirt with a distraught hand. Langdon smiled, but played the master card of saying nothing. "Even if I have to—to——"

More silence.

"Listen, Langdon. Oh, how *can* I say it?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, till I know what *it* is."

"My father—if he was yours, too—then you couldn't—you wouldn't, would you?"

"Wouldn't what?"

"Abuse him so?"

"Probably not," the young man admitted. "But how can your father be mine?"

"Stupid!"

"Is it possible," he queried, his eyes glinting, "that you are seeking to immolate yourself on the altars of filial devotion?"

"Oh, Langdon, can't you—won't you *see?*"

Langdon, thrilled with a vast exultation that stirred his soul ecstatically, like a sudden fanfare of trumpets, none the less held himself in leash.

"See what?" he demanded. When Langdon started to do anything, he always made a good, thorough-paced job of it.

Valeska clasped agitated hands. A sudden shiver of nerves, too long tensed, set her atremble.

"You—you're so different from anybody else," she hesitated. "And in such a different way. I mean, Langdon—you're a positive scream! Can you ever, *ever* forgive me? I've been such a pill!"

His hand enfolded hers comfortingly;

stilled its trembling. Her eyes deepened through a veil of tears and smiles. Masterfully Langdon drew her to him.

"Sure this isn't just for your father's sake?" He turned her face up to his and with possessive eyes studied its glad, distressed beauty.

"Oh, Langdon, *can't* you understand?"

NOW, when Severance Lee rounded the point some time later—panting, purple-faced and laden with lizards, nuts and eggs—he discovered an amazing spectacle.

"Well, I *will* be damned!" he prophesied.

The fact of the matter was, on the contrary, that he seemed about to be saved. But one can hardly blame Lee for an immense astonishment on beholding his silk-shirt signal now far aloft on a palm; Valeska standing on the beach, holding hands with Langdon; a little schooner in the offing, and a small boat lifting over the surf, rowed by two *café-au-lait* persons.

Lee dropped his burdens and broke into a noisy run.

"Look! Look a' there!" he vociferated. "We're saved!"

"Father, be calm," chided Valeska.

"Congratulate us," smiled Langdon.

"*What?*" gulped Lee, as he came to a stand near them.

"Oh, we're engaged, all right," laughed the girl.

"Have been for nearly an hour," Langdon added.

"And about half an hour after it happened, Langdon put that signal up there in that palm, and pretty soon that schooner came along, and——"

A hail from the approaching small boat nipped further parley. Langdon strode toward the surf.

"Isn't he just splendid, father?" Valeska demanded of the dumb-stricken Lee. Langdon's tousled hair, nascent beard, tanned face and bare legs made him rather a complete ruffian to look at, but if Valeska thought him just splendid, that was her own affair.

Langdon, meantime, was splashing out into the surf. A good way off shore, the small boat had grounded on the gently sloping sand. Both rowers clambered out.

"Snappy work!" Langdon said in a low tone to the lighter-hued of the pair. "You didn't waste much time, Chad old top, after I hoisted that shirt. You were right on the job."

"How d'you like my make-up?" asked Spenser Chadbourne, Langdon's one-time Princeton Kappa Gamma Phi brother, whose coconut plantation lay on the other side of the island, not above a mile from this beach.

"Fine! But remember you don't speak English. If they ever got wise to my having visited this island last year and knowing it like a book, or my getting matches and grub from you——"

"Leave it to me," promised Chadbourne. "I guess after the way I grabbed that boat off the mud-flat, and kept watch for your signal, I'm not going to spill any careless *frijoles*. Go on, now; get your victims!"

"Victims, nothing! It's done 'em both no end of good. *I* didn't tell 'em any lies. I just told 'em to look out for things, and they inferred that the things existed themselves. I'm not responsible for their auto-suggestions."

"Oh, you're a positive angel, *you* are! Go get 'em, anyhow."

Langdon returned up the beach.

"They're nut-freighters, bound for Independencia," he announced. "They'll take us right along."

"Hoo-*ray!*" exulted Lee. "Have they got any tobacco?"

"Ever know Cubans to be without the makin's?" Langdon answered with another question, but in rather a stifled voice, by reason of Valeska's arms about his neck, her kiss and her "Oh, how wonderful you are!"

Langdon broke away. He retrieved Lee's shirt from the palm. Lee struggled into it.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "You're *there*, Langdon! When we get back to civilization, will you—would you mind—that is, how about resuming business relations with me?"

"Oh, hang business!" laughed the girl. "Imagine talking business to a darling, great, big, funny, true-blue, resourceful caveman sweetheart!" And she kissed him again.

Then, as Langdon swung her up in his arms, and as he boldly bore her down to the boat through tumbling surf, she kissed him fervently once more.

"My man!" she whispered, as her plump and sunburned arms clung gladly round his neck. "My darling—and my brute!"

The Mystery *of* Ravensdene Court

The Captives Find That They Are in the Hands of Precious Rascals, and All Manner of Strange Things Happen to Them

By J. S. Fletcher

Illustration by Harry Fisk

MY CONNECTION with the strange double-murder mystery that excited all England early in the year 1912 came about through a visit to Ravensdene Court, near Alnwick, a remote village on the Northumbrian coast, whither I had gone as an expert to catalogue and appraise the library which Mr. Francis Raven had recently inherited from an uncle. The morning after my arrival, the body of a man, identified as Salter Quick, a seafarer of Devonport, was found on the beach near the house. He had been stabbed to death. Quick had come north on a search for graveyards containing tombstones bearing the name Netherfield.

There was nothing found on the body except a metal tobacco-box, on the inside of whose lid were scratched some lines and a deeply incised cross-mark. These proved of great interest to Septimus Cazalette, an aged and eccentric authority on numismatics, who was at Ravensdene Court examining a collection of coins and medals the house contained. He photographed the lid and announced his belief that the markings were the plan of some locality—the cross indicating a spot of particular importance. The box itself, I may add, strangely disappeared from the custody of the police at the inquest.

Salter's end was precisely similar to the one which, at the same moment, overtook his brother Noah near Devonport, where he kept an inn. It looked as if the two were in possession of some secret and had been done away with by men who were anxious to obtain it for themselves.

In a few days there arrived a detective named Scarterfield, who had been assigned to the case of Noah Quick, but as this was undoubtedly connected with Salter's murder, he had come north to continue his work. As a result of the investigation he had so far made, he was able to lay before us the following:

In October, 1907, a tramp steamer, the *Elizabeth Robinson*, sailed from Hongkong for Chemulpo, Korea, but never reached her destination and was never heard of. The list of names of those aboard included Noah and Salter Quick, set down as passengers; William Netherfield, of Blyth, a seaman, and Chuh Fen, a Chinese cook. Yet nearly five years later the Quicks were here in England, and a Chinaman calling himself Chuh Fen had, three years since, visited Lloyds to inquire if the *Elizabeth Robinson* had ever arrived at Chemulpo. The dectective was anxious to learn something about this Netherfield and to find Chuh Fen. Now, it so happened that a physician in Alnwick by the name of Lorrimore had a very shrewd and able Chinese servant named Wing, who, being consulted, announced his belief he could locate Chuh Fen if he were in England; so Wing was dispatched on this errand.

I offered my services to Scarterfield, and he went to Blyth, whither he presently summoned me. Nothing was known there of William Netherfield, but we got on the track of one Netherfield Baxter, a young man of Blyth, who, after dissipating an inheritance, disappeared in the year 1904, just after a bank-manager named Lester was killed in a bicycle accident. Then it had come out that Lester was a defaulter, and that two chests of plate, some of it jeweled, the property of the late Lord Forestburne, had disappeared from the strong room of the bank. Inventories showed that this treasure originally came from two religious houses in the neighborhood that had been suppressed in the reign of Henry the Eighth, and which, instead of being turned into the king's treasury, had been sequestrated by the then Lord of Forestburne. Now, was this Baxter the accomplice of Lester in the raid on the bank's strong room? Was he also the "William Netherfield" of the *Elizabeth Robinson;* did he thereon meet the Quicks and confide to them his secret? Were these markings on the tobacco-box a guide to the place where the plate had been buried?

While struggling with these questions we heard that Baxter had recently been seen in Hull, and thither we went post-haste. There we learned that three weeks before, Baxter, calling himself Norman Belford, had come to the town in company with a Frenchman, whom he addressed as "Vicomte," and a Chinaman, evidently of high rank. He purchased a yawl and sailed off with his companions, with Norway as their announced destination. Scarterfield was sure, however, that they had gone after the plate, which he believed to be hidden near Blyth, so he went back there while I returned to Ravensdene Court, where Mr. Cazalette, searching through local histories in the library, found a reference to the appropriation of the altar-vessels and so forth belonging to Forestburne Abbey by high-placed persons in the neighborhood.

Mr. Raven lived alone with his nineteen-year-old niece, Marcia, and she and I often took long walks. One day we came upon a clearing in a wood and surprised two men digging there. Presently we found ourselves their captives. I knew at once, from descriptions, that one of the men was Netherfield Baxter. I taxed him with this. He admitted it, and then told us he would have to detain us on board his yacht, anchored near by, for a short time. Thither we proceeded, our captors carrying two large chests, which I did not doubt were those missing from the bank at Blyth. I spoke of the murders of the Quicks, but Baxter vigorously denied any connection with them. He allowed us to send word to Mr. Raven merely that we would not be home that night. On the boat, tea, with plum cake, was served by a Chinaman. Sometime before, Miss Raven and I had had some very delicious plum cake at Lorrimore's, made by Wing, and no sooner had she taken a bite of that which was now offered than she whispered to me;

"Mr. Middlebrook, that man Wing is aboard this yacht. He made that cake!"

IT NEEDED little reflection to convince me that what my fellow prisoner had just suggested was well within the bounds of possibility. It was well within probabilities that Wing, being in Limehouse or Poplar, and in touch with Chinese sailormen, should, with others, have taken service with Baxter and his accomplice, and, at that very moment, there, in that sheltered cove on the Northumbrian coast, be within a few yards of Miss Raven and myself, separated from us by a certain amount of deck-planking and a few bulkheads. But why? If he was there, on that yawl, in what capacity—real capacity—was he there? Ostensibly as cook, no doubt—but that, I felt sure, would be a mere blind. Put plainly, if he was there, what game was that bland, suave, obsequious, soft-tongued Chinaman playing? Was this his way of finding out what all of us wanted to know? If it came to it, if there was occasion—such occasion as I dared not contemplate—could Miss Raven and myself count on Wing as a friend, or should we find him an adherent of the strange and curious gang which, if the truth was to be faced, literally held not only our liberty but our lives at its disposal?

As I stood there, leaning against the side, gloomily staring at the shore, which was so near and yet so impossible of access, I reviewed a point which was of more importance to me than may be imagined—the point of our geographical situation. I have already said that the yawl lay at anchor in a sheltered cove. The position of that cove was peculiar. It was plain to me, a landsman, that even a small vessel could get in or out of the cove only at high water. But once across the bar and within the narrow entry, any vessel coming in from the open sea would find itself in a natural harbor of great advantages. That the cove was known to the folk of that neighborhood it was impossible to doubt, but I felt sure that any strange craft passing along the sea in front would never suspect its existence, so carefully had nature concealed the entrance on the landward side of the bar. And there were no signs within the cove itself that any of the shore folk ever used it. Everything considered, Miss Raven and I were as securely trapped and as much at our captor's mercy as if we had been immured in a twentieth-century Bastille.

I went back presently to the tea-table and dropped into my deck-chair again. Baxter was still away from us; as far as I could see, there was no one about.

"What do you suppose is going to happen to us?" she asked, glancing over her shoulder at the open door of the galley into which Baxter had vanished.

"I think they'll detain us until they're ready to depart, and then they'll release us," I answered. "Under other conditions, I shouldn't have objected to meeting him. He's a character."

"Interesting, certainly," she agreed. "Do you think he really is a pirate?"

"I don't think he'll have any objection to making that quite clear to us if he is," I replied cynically. "I should say he'd be rather proud of it. But I think we shall hear a good deal of him before we get our freedom."

I WAS right there. Baxter seemed almost wistfully anxious to talk with us. A little later he said:

"You think me a strange fellow. Don't deny it. I am, and I don't mind who thinks it. Or—who knows it."

I made no reply beyond an acquiescent nod, but Miss Raven—who, all through this adventure, showed a coolness and resourcefulness which I can never sufficiently praise—looked steadily at him.

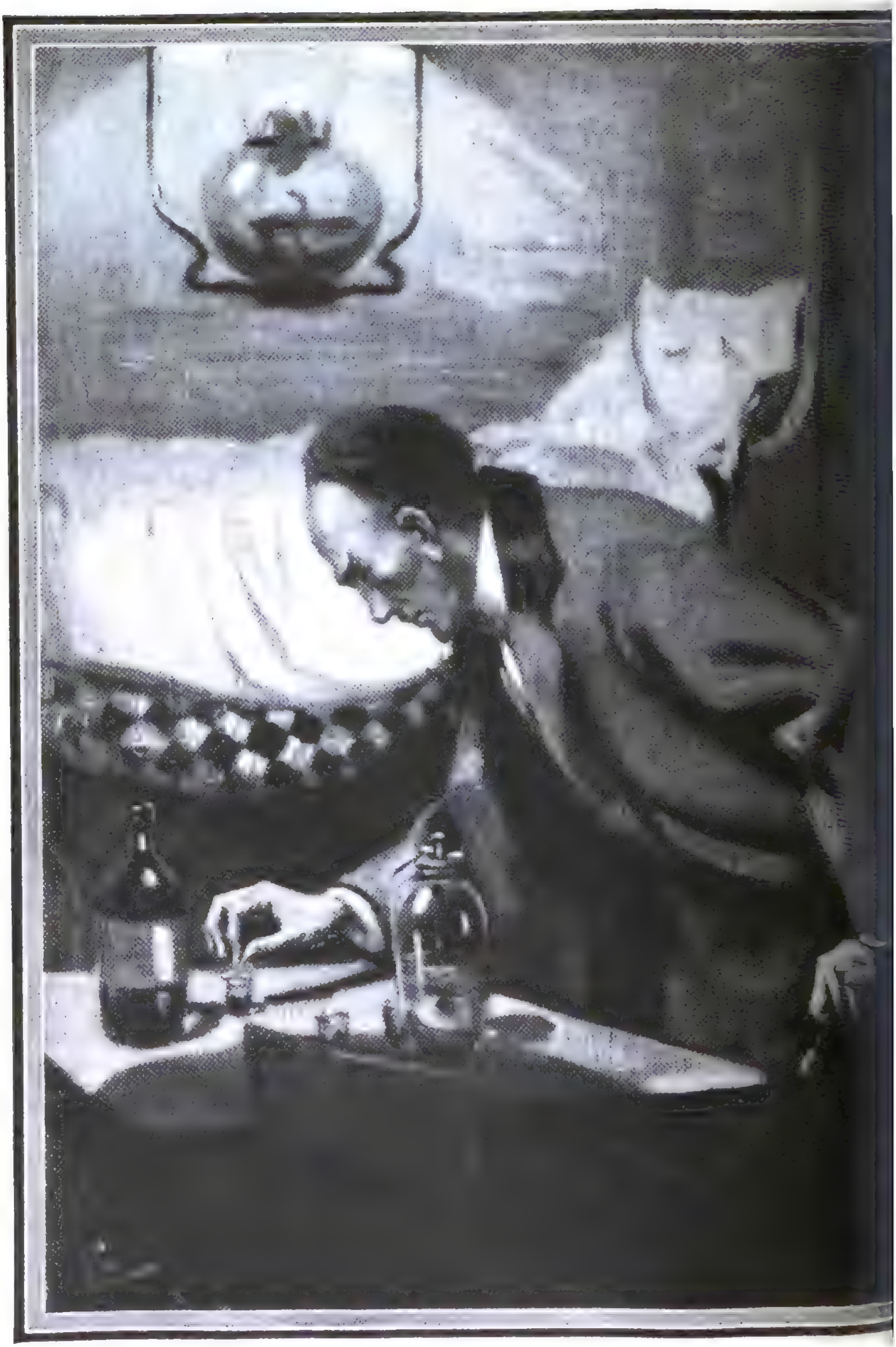
"I think you must have seen and known some strange things," she said quietly.

"What's really puzzling you at this time," he said, "is that Quick affair. I know, because I've not only read the newspapers but I've picked up a good deal of local gossip—never mind how. I've heard a lot of the goings-on at Ravensdene Court and the suspicions and so on. And I knew the Quicks—no man better at one time, and I'll tell you what I know. Not a nice story from any moral point of view; but though it's a story of rough men, there's nothing in it at all that need offend your ears, Miss Raven—nothing. It's just a story—an instance—of some of the things that happen to Ishmaels, outcasts, like me."

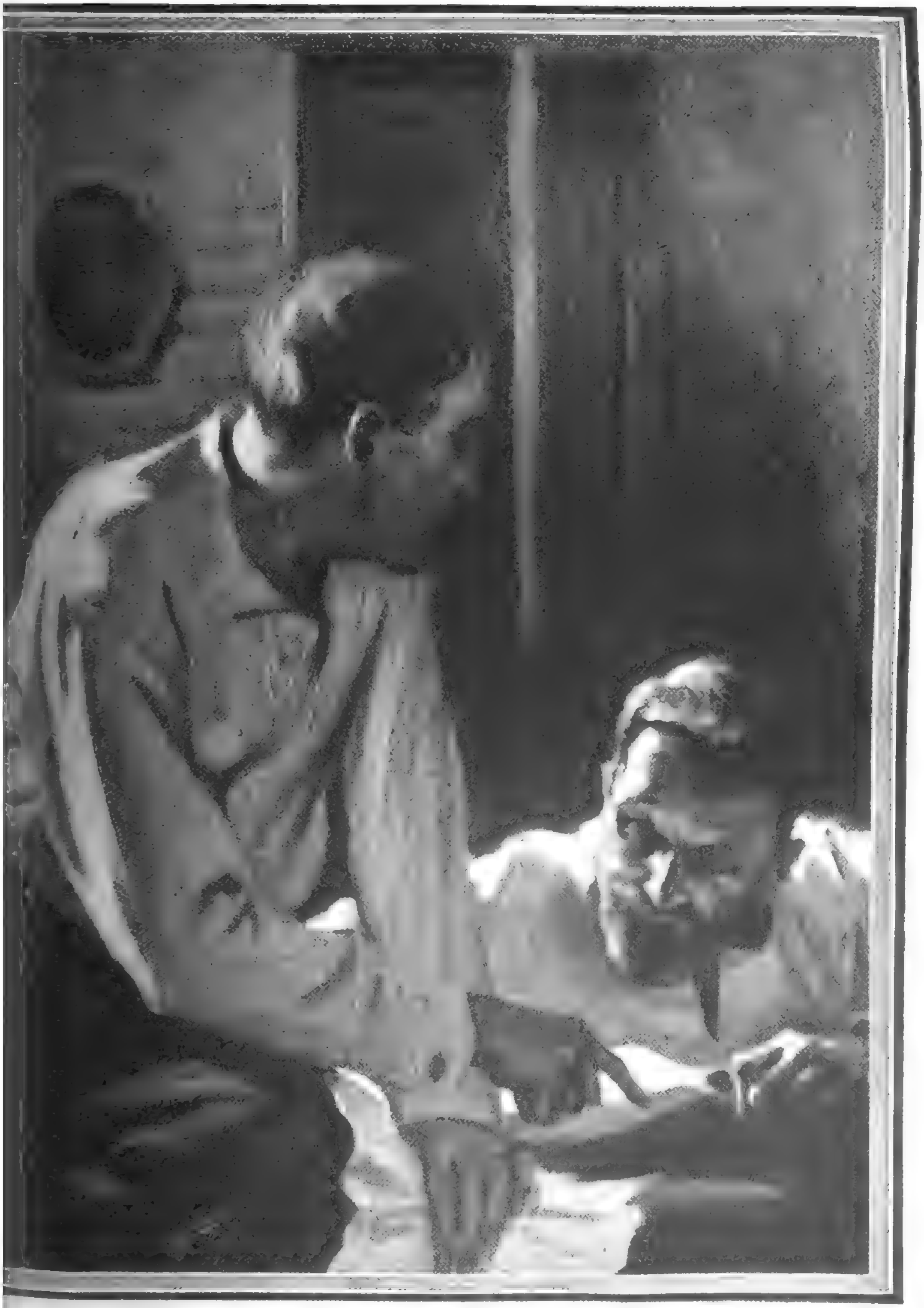
We made no answer, and he went on.

"You're both aware of my youthful career at Blyth," he said. "You, Middlebrook, are, anyway, from what you told me this afternoon, and I gather that you put Miss Raven in possession of the facts. Well, I'll start out from there—when I made the acquaintance of that temporary bank-manager chap. Mind you, I'd about come to the end of my tether at that time as regards money—I'd been pretty well fleeced by one or another, largely through carelessness, largely through sheer ignorance. I was robbed by more than one worthy man of my native town—legally, of course, bless 'em! And it was that, I think, turned me into the Ishmael I've been ever since. As men had robbed me, I thought it a fair thing to get a bit of my own back. Now, that bank-manager chap was one of those fellows who are born with predatory instincts—my impression of him, from what I recollect, is that he was a born thief. Anyway, he and I, getting pretty thick with each other, found out that we were just then actuated by similar ambitions—I from sheer necessity, he, as I tell you, from temperament. And to cut matters short, we determined to help ourselves out of certain things of value stored in that bank and to clear out to far-off regions with what we got. We discovered that two chests deposited in the bank's vaults by old Lord Forestburne contained a quantity of simply invaluable monastic spoil, stolen by the good man's ancestors four centuries before; we determined to have that and to take it over to the United States, where we knew we could realize immense sums on it from collectors, with no questions asked. We carefully removed the lot, brought them along the coast to this very cove, and interred them in those ruins where we three foregathered this afternoon."

"And whence, I take it, you have just removed them to the deck above our heads," I suggested.



Into two of the glasses the Chinaman dropped something small and white that sank



lisolved as rapidly as it was put in. It was all over within the fraction of a minute.

"Right, Middlebrook; quite right—there they are!" he admitted with a laugh. "A grand collection, too—chalices, patens, reliquaries, all manner of splendid medieval craftsmanship—and certain other more modern things with them—all destined for the other side of the Atlantic, where the market's sure and safe and ready——"

"You think you'll get them there?" I asked.

"I shall be more surprised than I ever was in my life if I don't," he answered readily. "They'd have been there long since if it hadn't been for an accident which I couldn't foresee—that bank-manager chap had the ill luck to break his neck. Now, that put me in a fix. I knew that the abstraction of these things would soon be discovered, and though I'd exercised great care in covering up all trace of my own share in the affair, there was always a bare possibility of something coming out. So, knowing the stuff was safely planted and very unlikely to be disturbed, I cleared out and determined to wait a fitting opportunity of regaining possession of it. Inquiries, of course, were set afoot about the missing property, but fortunately I was not suspected. And if I had been, I shouldn't have been found, for I know how to disappear as cleverly as any man who ever found that convenient."

HE THREW away the stump of his cigar, deliberately lighted another, and leaned across the table toward me in a more confidential manner.

"Now we're coming to the more immediately interesting part of the story," he said. "All that I've told you is, as it were, ancient history—we'll get to more modern times, affairs of yesterday, so to speak. After I cleared out of Blyth—with a certain amount of money in my pocket—I knocked about the world a good deal, doing one thing and another. I've been in every continent and in more seaports than I can remember. I've taken a share in all sorts of queer transactions from smuggling to slave-trading. I've been rolling in money in January and shivering in rags in June. All that was far away, in strange quarters of the world, for I never struck this country again until comparatively recently. I could tell you enough to fill a dozen fat volumes, but we'll cut all that out and get on to a certain time, now some years ago, whereat, in Hongkong, I and the man you saw with me this afternoon, who, if everybody had their own, is a genuine French nobleman, came across those two particularly precious villains, the brothers Noah and Salter Quick."

"Was that the first time of your meeting with them?" I asked. Now that he was evidently bent on telling me his story, I, on my part, was bent on getting out of him all that I could. "You'd never met them before—anywhere?"

"Never seen nor heard of them before," he answered. "We met in a certain house of call in Hongkong much frequented by Englishmen and Americans; we became friendly with them; we soon found out that they, like ourselves, were adventurers, would-be pirates, buccaneers, ready for any game; we found out, too, that they had money and could finance any desperate affair that was likely to pay handsomely. My friend and I, at that time, were also in funds—we had just had a very paying adventure in the Malay Archipelago, a bit of illicit trading, and we had got to Hongkong on the lookout for another opportunity. Once we had got thoroughly in with the Quicks, that was not long in coming. The Quicks were as sharp as their name—they knew the sort of men they wanted. And before long they took us into their confidence and told us what they were after and what they wanted us to do in collaboration with them. They wanted to get hold of a ship and to use it for certain nefarious trading-purposes in the China seas—they had a plan by which all of us could have made a lot of money. Needless to say, we were ready enough to go in with them. Already they had a scheme of getting a ship such as they particularly needed. There was at that time lying at Hongkong a sort of tramp steamer, the *Elizabeth Robinson*, the skipper of which wanted a crew for a trip to Chemulpo, up the Yellow Sea. Salter Quick got himself into the confidence and graces of this skipper and offered to man his ship for him, and he packed her as far as he could—with his own brother, Noah, myself, my French friend, and a certain Chinese cook of whom he knew and who could be trusted—trusted, that is, to fall in with whatever we wanted."

"Am I right in supposing the name of the

Chinese cook to have been Chuh Fen?" I asked.

"Quite right—Chuh Fen was the man," answered Baxter. "A very handy man for anything, as you'll admit, for you've already seen him—he's the man who attended on Miss Raven and who served our supper. I came across him again in Limehouse recently, and took him into my service once more. Very well—now you understand that there were five of us all in for the Quicks' plan, and the notion was that when we'd once got safely out of Hongkong, Salter, who had a particularly greasy and insinuating tongue, should get round certain others of the crew by means of promises helped out by actual cash bribes. That done, we were going to put the skipper, his mates and such of the men as wouldn't fall in with us in a boat with provisions, and let them find their way wherever they liked, while we went off with the steamer. That was the surface-plan—my own belief is that, if it had come to it, the two Quicks would have been quite ready to make skipper and men walk the plank, or to have settled them in any other way. Both Noah and Salter, for all their respectable appearance, were born out of their due time—they were admirably qualified to have been lieutenants to Captain Kidd or any other seventeenth-century pirate. But in this particular instance their schemes went all wrong. Whether it was that the skipper of the *Elizabeth Robinson*, who was an American and cuter than we fancied, got wind of something, or whether somebody split to him, I didn't know, but the fact is that one fine morning when we were in the Yellow Sea, he and the rest of them set on the Quicks, my friend, myself and the Chinaman, bundled us into a boat and landed us on a miserable island to fend for ourselves. There we were, the five of us—a precious bad lot, to be sure—marooned!"

"You'd a stiff time of it?" I suggested.

"Worse than you'd believe," he answered. "That old Yankee skipper was a vindictive chap, with method in him. He'd purposely gone off the beaten track to land us on that island, and he played his game so cleverly that not even the Quicks, who were as subtle as snakes, knew anything of his intentions until we were all marched over the side at the point of ugly-looking revolvers. If it hadn't been for that little Chinese whom you've just seen, we would have starved, for the island was little more than a reef of rock, rising to a sort of peak in its center—worn-out volcano, I imagine—and with nothing eatable on it in the way of flesh or fruit. But Chuh was a godsend. He was clever at fishing, and he showed us an edible seaweed out of which he made good eating, and he discovered a spring of water—altogether he kept us alive. All of which," he suddenly added, with a darkening look, "made the conduct of these two Quicks not merely inexcusable but devilish!"

"What did they do?" I asked.

"I'M COMING to it," he said, "all in due order. We were on that island several weeks, and from the time we were flung unceremoniously upon its miserable shores to the day we left it, we never saw a sail or a wisp of smoke from a steamer. And it may be that this, and our privations, made us still more birds of a feather than we were. Anyway, you, Middlebrook, know how men thrown together in that way will talk—nay, must talk unless they'd go mad—talk about themselves and their doings and so on. We all talked—we used to tell tales of our doubtful pasts as we huddled together under the rocks at night, and some nice, lurid stories they were, I can assure you. The Quicks had seen about as much of the doubtful and seamy side of seafaring life as men could, and all of us could contribute something. Also, the Quicks had money, safely stowed away in banks here and there—they used to curse their fate, left there apparently to die, when they thought of it. And it was that, I think, that led me to tell, one night, about my adventure with the naughty bank-manager at Blyth, and of the chests of old monastic treasure which I'd planted up here on this Northumbrian coast."

"Ah!" I exclaimed. "So you told Noah and Salter Quick that?"

"I told Noah and Salter Quick that," he replied slowly. "Yes—and I can now explain to you what Salter was after when he appeared in these parts. I read the newspaper accounts of the inquest and so on, and I saw through everything, and could have thrown a lot of light on things; only, I wasn't going to. But it was this way: I old the Quicks all about the Blyth affair—

the truth was, I didn't believe we should ever get away from that cursed island—but I told them in a fashion which, evidently, afterward led to considerable puzzlement on their part. I told them that I buried the chests of old silver, wherein were the other valuables taken from the vaults of the bank, in a churchyard on this coast, close to the graves of my ancestors—I described the spot and the lie of the ruins pretty accurately. Now, where the Quicks—Salter, at any rate—got puzzled and mixed was over my use of the word 'ancestors.' What I meant—but never said—was that I had planted the stuff near the graves of my maternal ancestors, the old de Knaythvilles, who were once great folk in these parts, and of whose name my own Christian name, Netherfield, is, of course, a corruption. But Salter Quick, to be sure, thought the graves would bear the name Netherfield, and when he came along this coast it was that name he was hunting for. Do you see?"

"THEN Salter Quick was after that treasure?" I said.

"Of course he was!" replied Baxter. "The wonder to me is that he and Noah hadn't been after it before. But they were men who had a good many irons in the fire—too many, and some of them far too hot, as it turned out—and I suppose they left this little affair until an opportune moment. Without a doubt, not so long after I'd told them the story, Salter Quick scratched inside the lid of his tobacco-box a rough diagram of the place I'd mentioned, with the latitude and longitude approximately indicated—that's the box I read in the papers there's been so much fuss about, and I'll tell you more about it in due process. But now about that island and the Quicks, and how they and the rest of us got out of it. I told you that the center of this island rose to a high peak, separating one coast from the other. Well, one day, when we'd been marooned for several weary weeks and there didn't seem the least chance of rescue, I, my French friend and the Chinaman crossed the shoulder of that peak and went along the other coast, prospecting—more out of sheer desperation than in the hope of finding anything. We spent the next night on the other side of the island, and it was not until late on the following afternoon that we returned to our camp, if you can call that a camp which was nothing but a hole in the rocks. And we got back to find Noah and Salter Quick gone—and we knew how they had gone when the Chinaman's sharp eyes made out a sail vanishing over the horizon. Some Chinese fishing-boat had made that island in our absence, and these two skunks had gone away in her and left us, their companions, to shift for ourselves. That's the sort the Quicks were—that was the kind of tricks they'd play on so-called friends! Do you wonder, either of you, that both Noah and Salter eventually got—what they got?"

We made no answer to that beyond, perhaps, a shake of our heads. Then Miss Raven spoke.

"But—you got away in the end," she suggested.

"We got away in the end—sometime later, when we were about done for," assented Baxter, "and in the same way—a Chinese fishing-boat that came within hail. It landed us on the Kiangsu coast, and we had a pretty bad time of it before we made our way to Shanghai. From that port we worked our passage to Hongkong; I had an idea that we might strike the Quicks there, or get news of them. But we heard nothing—of those two villains, at any rate. But we did hear that the *Elizabeth Robinson* had never reached Chemulpo—she'd presumably gone down with all hands, and we were supposed, of course, to have gone down with her. We did nothing to disabuse anybody of the notion; both I and my friend had money in Hongkong, and we took it up and went off to Singapore. As for our Chinaman, Chuh, he said farewell to us and vanished as soon as we got back to Hongkong, and we never set eyes on him again until very recently, when I ran across him in a Chinese eating-house in Poplar."

"From that meeting, I suppose, the more recent chapters of your story begin," I suggested. "Or do they begin somewhat earlier?"

"A bit earlier," he said. "My friend and I came back to England a little before that—with money in our pockets—we'd been very lucky in the East—and with a friend of ours, a Chinese gentleman, mind you, we decided to go in for a little profitable work of another sort and to start out by lifting my concealed belongings up here.

So we bought this craft in Hull—then ran her down to the Thames—then, as I say, I came across Chuh Fen and got his services and those of two other compatriots of his, then in London, and—here we are! You see how candid I am—do you know why?"

"It would be interesting to know, Mr. Baxter," said Miss Raven. "Please tell us."

"WELL," he said, with deliberation, "some men in my position would have thought nothing about putting bullets through both of you when we met this afternoon—you hit on our secret. But I'm not that sort—I treat you as what you are, a gentlewoman and a gentleman, and no harm whatever shall come to you. Therefore, I feel certain that all I've said and am saying to you will be treated as it ought to be—by you. I dare say you think I'm an awful scoundrel, but I told you I was an Ishmael—and I certainly haven't got the slightest compunction about appropriating the stuff in those chests on deck. One of the Forestburnes stole it from the monks—why shouldn't I steal it from his successor? It's as much mine as his—perhaps more so, for one of my ancestors, a certain Geoffrey de Knaythville, was at one time lord abbot of the very house that the Forestburnes stole that stuff from. I reckon I've a prior claim, Middlebrook?"

"I should imagine," I answered guardedly, "that it would be very difficult for anybody to substantiate a claim to ecclesiastical property—of that particular nature—which disappeared in the sixteenth century. What is certain, however, is that you've got it. Take my advice—hand it over to the authorities."

He looked at me in blank astonishment for a moment; then laughed as a man laughs who is suddenly confronted by a good joke.

"Hah, hah, hah!" he let out at the top of his voice. "Good! You're a born humorist, friend Middlebrook!" He pushed the claret nearer. "Fill your glass again! Hand it over to the authorities? Why, that would merit a full-page cartoon in the next number of *Punch*. Good—good! But," he went on, suddenly becoming grave again, "we were talking of those scoundrelly Quicks. Of course we—that is, my French friend and I—have been, and are, suspected of murdering them?"

"I think that is so," I answered.

"Well, that's a very easy point to settle if it should ever come to it," he replied. "And I'll settle it, for your edification, just now. Noah and Salter Quick were done to death, one near Saltash, in Cornwall, the other near Alnwick, in Northumberland, several hundreds of miles apart, about the same hour of the same day. Now, my friend and I, so far from being anywhere near either Saltash or Alnwick on that particular day and night, spent them together at the North Eastern Railway Hotel at York. I went there the day before from London; he joined me from Berwick. We met at the hotel about six o'clock; we dined in the hotel; we played billiards in the hotel; we slept in the hotel; we breakfasted in the hotel; the hotel folks will remember us well, and our particulars are duly registered in their books on the date in question. We had no hand whatever in the murders of Noah and Salter Quick, and I give you my word of honor—being under the firm impression that, though I am a pirate, I am still a gentleman—that neither of us have the very slightest notion who had."

Miss Raven made an involuntary murmur of approval, and I was so much convinced of the man's good faith that I stretched out my hand to him.

"Mr. Baxter," said I, "I'm heartily glad to have that assurance from you. And whether I'm a humorist or not, I'll beg you once more to take my advice and give up that loot to the authorities—you can make a plausible excuse and throw all the blame on that bank-manager fellow, and, take my word for it, little will be said—and then you can devote your undoubtedly great and able talents to legitimate ventures."

"That would be as dull as ditch-water, Middlebrook," he retorted, with a grin. "You're tempting me. But those Quicks—I'll tell you in what fashion there is a connection between their murder and ourselves, and one that would need some explanation. Bear in mind that I've kept myself posted in those murders through the newspapers, and also by collecting a certain amount of local gossip. Now—you've a certain somewhat fussy and garrulous old gentleman at Ravensdene Court——"

"Mr. Cazalette!" exclaimed Miss Raven.

"Cazalette is the name," said Baxter. "I have heard much of him, through the sources I've just referred to. Now, this Mr. Cazalette, going to or coming from a place where he bathed every morning, which place happened to be near the spot whereat Salter Quick was murdered, found a bloodstained handkerchief?"

"He did," said I. "And a lot of mystery attaches to it."

"That handkerchief belongs to my French friend," said Baxter. "I told you that he joined me at York from Berwick. As a matter of fact, for some little time just before the Salter Quick affair he was down on this coast, posing as a tourist, but really just ascertaining if things were as I'd left them at the ruins in the woods above this cove and what would be our best method of getting the chests of stuff away. For a week or so he lodged at an inn somewhere, I think, near Ravensdene Court, and he used sometimes to go down to the shore for a swim. One morning he cut his foot on the pebbles, and stanched the blood with his handkerchief which he carelessly threw away—and your Mr. Cazalette evidently found it. That's the explanation of that little matter. And now for the tobacco-box."

"A much more important point," said I.

"JUST so," agreed Baxter. "Now, my friend and I first heard of the murder while we were at York. In the newspaper that we read there was an account of a conversation which took place between this old Mr. Cazalette and a police inspector, regarding a certain metal tobacco-box found on Salter Quick's body. Now, I give you my word that that news was the first intimation we had ever had that the Quicks were in England. Until then we hadn't the slightest idea that they were in England—but we knew what those mysterious scratches in the tobacco-box signified—Salter had made a rude plan of the place I had told him of, and was in Northumberland to search for it. Then, later, we read your evidence at the opening of the inquest, and heard what you had to tell about his quest of the Netherfield graves, and—just to satisfy ourselves—we determined to get hold of that tobacco-box, for, you see, as long as it was about, a possible clue, there was a danger of somebody discovering our buried chests of silver and valuables. So my friend came down again in his tourist capacity, put up at the same quarters, strolled about, fished a bit, botanized a bit, attended the adjourned inquest as a casual spectator and—abstracted the tobacco-box under the very noses of the police! It's in that locker now," continued Baxter, with a laugh, pointing to a corner of the cabin, "and with it are the handkerchief and your old friend Mr. Cazalette's pocket-book——"

"Oh! your friend got that, too, did he?" I exclaimed. "I see!"

"He abstracted that, too, easily enough, one morning when the old fellow was bathing," assented Baxter. "Naturally, we weren't going to take any chances about our hidden goods being brought to light. We're highly indebted to Mr. Cazalette for making so much fuss about the tobacco-box, and we're glad there was so much local gossip about it. Eh?"

I remained silent a while, reflecting.

"It's a very fortunate thing for both of you that you could, if necessary, prove your presence at York on the day of the murder," I remarked at last. "Your doings about the tobacco-box and the other things might otherwise wear a very suspicious look. As it is, I'm afraid the police would probably say—granted that they knew what you've just told us so frankly—that even if you and your French friend didn't murder Salter Quick and his brother, you were probably accessory to both murders. That's how it strikes me, anyway."

"I think you're right," he said calmly. "Probably they would. But the police would be wrong. We were not accessory, either before or since. We haven't the ghost of a notion as to the identity of the Quicks' murderers. But since we're discussing that, I'll tell you both of something that seems to have completely escaped the notice of the police, the detectives and of you yourself, Middlebrook. You remember that in both cases the clothing of the murdered men had been literally ripped to pieces?"

"Very well," said I. "It had—in Salter's, anyway, to my knowledge."

"And so, they said, it had in Noah's," replied Baxter. "And the presumption, of course, was that the murderers were searching for something?"

"Of course," I said. "What other presumption could there be?"

Baxter gave us both a keen, knowing look, bent across the table and tapped my arm as if to arrest my closer attention.

"How do you know that the murderers didn't find what they were seeking for?" he asked in a low, forceful voice. "Come, now!"

I stared at him; so, too, did Miss Raven. He laughed.

"That, certainly, doesn't seem to have struck anybody," he said. "I'm sure, anyway, it hasn't struck you before. Does it now?"

"I'd never thought of it," I admitted.

"Exactly! Nor, according to the papers—and to my private information—had anybody," he answered. "Yet it would have been the very first thought that would have occurred to me. I should have said to myself, seeing the ripped-up clothing, 'Whoever murdered these men was in search of something that one or other of the two had concealed on him, and the probability is he's got it.' Of course!"

"I'm sure nobody—police or detectives—ever did think of that," said I. "But—perhaps with your knowledge of the Quicks' antecedents and queer doings, you have some knowledge of what they might be likely to carry about them."

He laughed at that, and again leaned nearer to us.

"Aye, well!" he replied. "As I've told you so much, I'll tell you something more. I do know of something that the two men had on them when they were on that miserable island and that they, of course, carried away with them when they escaped. Noah and Salter Quick were then in possession of two magnificent rubies—worth no end of money!"

I COULD not repress an unconscious, involuntary start on hearing this remarkable declaration.

"Heaps of money!" he went on. "Do you know anything about rubies? Not much? Well, the ruby, I dare say you do know, is the most precious of precious stones. The real true ruby, the Oriental one, is found in greatest quantity in Burma and Siam, and the best are those that come from Mogok, which is a district lying north of Mandalay. These rubies that the Quicks had came from there—they were remarkably fine ones. And I know how and where those precious villains got them."

"Yes?" I said, feeling that another dark story lay behind this declaration. "Not honestly, I suppose?"

"Far from it," he replied, with a grim smile. "Those two rubies formed the eyes of some ugly god or other in a heathen temple in the Kwangtung province of southern China where the Quicks carried on more nefarious practises than that. They gouged them out—according to their own story. Then, of course, they cleared off.

"My own belief is that after Salter Quick joined Noah at Devonport, both brothers were steadily watched by men who knew what they had on them, and that when Salter came north he was followed, just as Noah was tracked down at Saltash. And I should say that whoever murdered them got the rubies—they may have been on Noah; they may have been on Salter; one may have been in Salter's possession, one in Noah's. But there—in the rubies—lies, in my belief, the secret of those murders."

Then, with a curt politeness, he bade us both good-night and went off on deck, and we two captives looked at each other.

"Strange man!" murmured Miss Raven. She gave me a direct glance that had a lot of meaning in it. "Mr. Middlebrook," she went on in a still lower voice, "let me tell you that I'm not afraid. I'm sure that man means no personal harm to us. But—is there anything you want to say to me before I go?"

"Only this," I answered: "Do you sleep very soundly?"

"Not so soundly that I shouldn't hear if you called me," she replied.

"I'm going to mount guard here," I said. "I, too, believe in what Baxter says. But—if I should, for any reason, have occasion to call you during the night, do at once precisely what I tell you to do."

The Chinaman who had been in evidence at intervals since our arrival came into the little saloon with a can of hot water and disappeared into the inner cabin which had been given up to Miss Raven. She softly said good-night to me, with a reassurance of her confidence that all would be well, and followed him. I heard her talking to this strange makeshift for a maid for a moment or two; then the man came out, grinning as if well pleased with himself, and she closed and fastened the door on him. The Chinaman turned to me, asking in a soft voice if there was anything I pleased to need.

"Nothing but some rugs and pillows to sleep on," I answered.

He opened a locker on the floor of the place and, producing a number of cushions and blankets from it, made me up a very tolerable couch. Then, with a polite bow, he, too, departed, and I was left alone.

Everything on board that strange craft was as still as the skies above her decks. I heard no sound whatever save a very gentle lapping of the water against the vessel's timbers and, occasionally, the far-off hooting of owls in the woods that overhung the cove. These sounds, of course, were provocative of slumber; I had to keep smoking to prevent myself from dropping into a doze. And perhaps two hours may have gone in this fashion, and it was, I should think, a little after midnight when I heard, at first far away toward the land, then gradually coming nearer, the light, slow plashing of oars that gently and leisurely rose and fell.

THIS, of course, was the Frenchman, coming back from his mission to Berwick—he would, I knew, have gone there from the little wayside station that lay beyond the woods at the back of the cove and have returned by a late train to the same place. Somehow—I could not well account for it—the mere fact of his coming back made me nervous and uneasy. I was not so certain about his innocence in the matter of Salter Quick's murder. On Baxter's own showing, the Frenchman had been hanging about the coast for some little time, just when Salter Quick descended upon it. He, like Baxter, if Baxter's story were true, was aware that one or other of the Quicks carried those valuable rubies; even if, the York episode being taken for granted, he had not killed Salter Quick himself, he might be privy to the doings of some accomplice who had. Anyway, he was a doubtful quantity, and the mere fact that he was back again on the yawl made me more resolved than ever to keep awake and preserve a sharp lookout.

I heard the boat come alongside; I heard steps on the deck just outside my open door; then Baxter's voice. Presently, too, I heard other voices—one that of the Frenchman, which I recognized from having heard him speak in the afternoon; the other, a soft, gentle, laughing voice—without doubt that of an Easterner. This, of course, would be the Chinese gentleman of whom I had heard—the man who had been seen in company with Baxter and the Frenchman at Hull. So now the three principal actors in this affair were all gathered together, separated from me and Miss Raven by a few planks, and close by were three Chinese of whose qualities I knew nothing. Safe we might be—but we were certainly on the very edge of a hornets' nest.

I heard the three men talking together in low, subdued tones for a few minutes; then they went along the deck above me and the sound of their steps ceased. But as I lay there in the darkness, two round disks of light suddenly appeared on a mirror which hung on the boarding of the cabin immediately facing me, and, turning my head sharply, I saw that in the bulkhead behind me there were two similar holes, pierced in what was probably a door, which would, no doubt, be sunk flush with the boarding and was possibly the entrance to some other cabin that could be entered from a farther part of the deck. Behind that, under a newly lighted lamp, the three men were now certainly gathered.

I got out of my wrappings and my corner so noiselessly that I don't believe any one actually present in my cabin would have heard even a rustle, and tiptoeing in my stockinged feet across to the bulkhead which separated me from the three men, put an eye to one of the holes. To my great joy I then found that I could see into the place to which Baxter and his companions had retreated. It was a sort of cabin, rougher in accommodation than that in which I stood, fitted with bunks on three sides and furnished with a table in the center, over which swung a lamp. The three men stood round this table, examining some papers—the lamplight fell full on all three. Baxter stood there in his shirt and trousers; the Frenchman also was half dressed, as if preparing for rest. But the third man was still as he had come aboard—a little, yellow-faced, dapper, sleek Chinaman, whose smart velvet-collared overcoat, thrown open, revealed an equally smart dark-tweed suit beneath it, and an elegant gold watch-chain festooned across the waistcoat. And on the table before the three stood a whisky-bottle, a siphon of mineral water, and glasses, which had evidently just been filled.

Baxter and the Frenchman stood elbow to elbow; the Frenchman held in his hands a number of sheets of paper, foolscap size, to the contents of which he was obviously drawing Baxter's attention. Presently they turned to a desk which stood in one corner of the place, and Baxter, lifting its lid, produced a big ledgerlike book, over which they bent, evidently comparing certain entries in it with the papers in the Frenchman's hand. What book or papers might be, I, of course, knew nothing, for all this was done in silence. But had I known anything or heard anything, it would have seemed of no significance compared with what I just then saw—a thing that suddenly turned me almost sick with a nameless fear and set me trembling from toe to finger.

The dapper and smug Chinaman, statuesque on one side of the table, immovable save for an occasional puff of his cigar, suddenly shot into silent activity as the two men turned their backs on him and bent, apparently absorbed, over the desk in the corner. Like a flash (it reminded me of the lightninglike movement of a viper), his long, thin fingers went into a waistcoat pocket; like a flash emerged, shot to the glasses on the table and into two of them dropped something small and white—some tabloid or pellet—that sank and dissolved as rapidly as it was put in. It was all over, all done, within, literally, the fraction of a minute; when, a moment or two later, Baxter and the Frenchman turned round again, after throwing the ledgerlike book and the papers into the desk, their companion was placidly smoking his cigar and sipping the contents of his glass between the whiffs.

I was by that time desperately careless as to whether I might or might not be under observation from the open door and stairway of my own cabin. I remained where I was, my eye glued to that ventilation-hole, watching. For it seemed to me that the Chinaman was purposely drugging his companions for some insidious purpose of his own—in that case, what of the personal safety of Miss Raven and myself? But I reflected that it would be useless to make a scene. The only thing to do was wait.

Nothing happened. Baxter gulped down his drink as a single draft; the Frenchman took his in two leisurely swallows; each flung himself on his bunk, pulled his blankets about him, and, as far as I could see, seemed to fall asleep instantly. But the Chinaman was more deliberate and punctilious. He took his time over his cigar and his whisky; he pulled out a suitcase from some nook or other and produced from it a truly gorgeous sleeping-suit of gaily striped silk; it occupied him quite twenty minutes to get undressed and into this grandeur, and even then he lingered, fiddling about in carefully folding and arranging his garments. In the course of this, and in moving about the narrow cabin, he took apparently casual glances at Baxter and the Frenchman, and I saw from his satisfied, quiet smirk that each was sound asleep. And then he thrust his feet into a pair of bedroom slippers, as loud in their coloring as his pajamas, and suddenly turning down the lamp with a twist of his wicked-looking fingers, he glided out of the door into the darkness above. At that I, too, glided swiftly back to my blankets.

I HEARD steps, soft as snowflakes, go along the deck above me. For an instant they paused by the open door at the head of my stairway; then they went on again and all was silent as before. But in that silence, above the gentle lapping of the water against the side of the yawl, I heard the furious thumping of my own heart—and I did not wonder at it, nor was I then, nor am I now, ashamed of the fear that made it thump. Clearly, whatever else it might mean, if Baxter and the Frenchman were, as I surely believed them to be, soundly drugged, Miss Raven and I were at the positive mercy of a pack of Chinese adventurers who would probably stick at nothing.

I suppose it was nearly an hour that passed—it may have been more; it may have been less. What I know is that it gave me some idea of what an accused man may feel who, waiting in a cell below, wonders what the foreman of the jury is going to say when he is called up-stairs once more to the dock which he has vacated pending that jury's deliberations. There I lay, sweating with fear, rapidly disintegrating as to nerve-power, becoming a lump of moral rag and bone—and suddenly, unheralded by the slightest sound, I saw the figure of a man on my stairway, his outline silhouetted against the sky and the stars.

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It was not because of any bravery on my part—I am sure of that—but through sheer fright that, before I had the least idea of what I was doing, I had thrown myself clear of rugs and pillows, sprung to my feet, made one frenzied leap across the bit of intervening space and clutched my intruder by his arms before his softly padded feet touched the floor of the cabin. My own breath was coming in gasps—but the response to my frenzy was quiet and cool as an autumnal afternoon.

"Can you row a boat?"

I shall never forget the mental douche which dashed itself over me in that clear yet barely perceptible whisper, accompanied, as it was, by a ghostlike laugh of sheer amusement. I released my grip, staring in the starlight at my visitor. Chuh Fen!

"Yes," I answered, steadying my voice and keeping it down to as low tones as his own. "Yes—I can."

He pointed to the door behind which lay Miss Raven.

"Wake missy—as quietly as possible," he whispered. "Tell her get ready—come on deck—make no noise. All ready for you—then you go ashore and away—see? Not good for you to be here longer."

"No danger to her?" I asked him.

"No danger to anybody. You do as I say," he answered. "All ready for you—nothing to do but come on deck forward, get into the boat, be off. Now!"

Without another word he glided up the stairway and disappeared. For a few seconds I stood irresolute. Was it a trick, a plant? Should we be safe on deck—or targets for Chinese bullets, or receptacles for Chinese knives? Maybe—yet——

I suddenly made up my mind. It was but one step to the door of the little inner cabin. I scraped on its panels. It opened instantly, a crack.

"Yes?" whispered Miss Raven.

I remembered then that if need arose she was to do unquestioningly anything I told her to do.

"Dress at once and come out," I said. "Be quick!"

"I've never been undressed," she answered. "I lay down in my clothes."

"Then come now," I commanded. "Wait for nothing!"

She was out of the room at once and by my side in the gloom. I laid a hand on her arm, giving its plump softness a reassuring pressure.

"Don't be afraid," I whispered. "Follow me on deck. We're going."

"Going!" she said. "Leaving?"

"Come along," said I.

I WENT before her up the stairway and out on the open deck. The night was particularly clear; the stars were very bright; the patch of water between the yawl and the shore lay before us calm and dark; we could see the woods above the cove quite plainly, and at the edge of them a ribbon of white, the silver-sanded beach. And also, at the forward part of the vessel we were leaving, I saw, or fancied I saw, shadowy forms—the Chinese were going to see us off.

But one form was not shadowy or problematical. Chuh was there, awaiting us, his arms filled with rugs. Without a word he motioned us to follow, preceded us along the side of the yawl to the boat, went before us into it, helped us down, settled us, put the oars into my hands, climbed out again and leaned his yellow face down to me.

"You pull straight ahead," he murmured. "Good landing-place straight before you; dry place on beach, too—morning come soon; you get away then through woods."

"The boat?" I asked him.

"You leave boat there—anywhere," he answered. "Boat not wanted again—we go, soon as high water over bar. Hope you get young missy safe home."

"Bless you!" I said, under my breath.

Then, remembering that I had some money in my pocket, three or four loose sovereigns, as luck would have it, I thrust a hand therein, pulled them out, forced them into the man's clawlike fingers. I heard him chuckle softly; then his head disappeared behind the rail of the yawl and I shoved the boat off, and for the next few minutes bent to those oars as I had certainly never bent to any previous labor, mental or physical, in my life. And Miss Raven, seeing my earnestness, said nothing but quietly took the tiller and steered us in a straight line for the spot which the Chinaman had indicated. Neither of us—strange as it may seem—spoke one single word until, at the end of half an hour's steady pull, the boat's nose ran on to the shingly beach beneath a fringe of dwarf oak that came right down to the edge of the shore. I sprang out with a feeling of thankfulness that it would be hard to describe, and for a good reason found my tongue once more.

"What does all this mean?" she said at last suddenly. "Why have they let us go?"

"No idea," I answered. "But—things have happened since Baxter said good-night to us. Listen!" And I went on to tell her of all that had taken place on the yawl since the return of the Frenchman and his Chinese companion. "What does it look like?" I concluded. "Doesn't it seem as if the Chinese intend foul play to those two?"

"Do you mean—that they intend to—to murder them?" she asked in a half-frightened whisper. "Surely not that?"

"I don't see that a man who has lived the life that Baxter has can expect anything but a violent end," I replied callously. "Yes; I suppose that's what I do mean. I think the Chinese mean to get rid of the two others and get away with the swag—cleverly enough, no doubt."

"Horrible!" she murmured.

"Inevitable," said I. "To my mind, the whole atmosphere was one of—that sort of thing. We're most uncommonly lucky."

She became silent again and remained so for some time, while I went on at my task, binding strips of rug about my feet and ankles to take the place of the boots I had left on board."

"I don't understand it!" she exclaimed, after several minutes had gone by. "Surely those men must know that we, once free of them, would be sure to give the alarm. We weren't under any promise to them, whatever we were to Baxter."

"I don't understand anything," I said. "All I know is the surface of the situation. But that gentle villain who saw us off the yawl said that they were sailing at high water—only waiting until the water was deep on the bar outside there. And they could get a long way, north or south or east, before we could set anybody on to them. Suppose they get rid of Baxter and his Frenchman—what's to prevent them making off across the North Sea to, say, some port in the north of Russia? They've got stuff on board that would be salable anywhere; no doubt they'll have melted it all into shapeless lumps before many hours are over."

Once more she was silent, and when she spoke again, it was in a note of decision.

"No; I don't think that's it at all," she said emphatically. "They're dependent on wind and weather, and the seas aren't so wide but that they'd be caught on our information. I'm sure that isn't it."

"What is it, then?" I asked.

"I've a sort of vague, misty idea," she answered, with a laugh that was plainly intended to be depreciatory of her own power. "Suppose these Chinese—you say they're awfully keen and astute—suppose they've got a plot among themselves for handing Baxter and the Frenchman over to the police, the authorities, with their plunder. Do you see?"

I HAD just finished the manufacture of my novel foot-wear, and I jumped to my padded feet with an exclamation that—this time—did not come from unpleasant contact with the sharp stones.

"By George!" I said. "There is an idea in that! There may be something in it."

"We thought Wing was on board," she continued. "If so, I think I may be right in offering such a suggestion. Suppose that Wing came across these people when he went to London, took service with them in the hope of getting at their secret; suppose he's induced the other Chinese to secure Baxter and the Frenchman—that, in short, he's been playing the part of detective. Wouldn't that explain why they sent us away?"

Just then our discussion was stopped by a startling noise. Across the three-quarters of a mile of water which separated us from our recent prison came the sound, clear and unmistakable, of a revolver-shot followed almost instantly by another. Miss Raven, who had risen to her feet, suddenly sat down again. A third shot rang out—a fourth—a fifth; we saw the flashes of each; they came without doubt from the deck of the yawl.

"Firing," she murmured.

"Fighting!" said I. "That's just— Listen to that!"

Half a dozen reports, sharp, insistent, rang out in quick succession; then two or three, all mingling together; the echoes followed from wood and cliff. Rapidly as the flashes pierced the gloom, the sounds died out—a heavy silence followed.

And then, at that moment, we both heard something else. Somewhere outside the bar but close to the shore, a steam-propelled vessel was tearing along at a breakneck speed.

As we stood there watching, the long yellow light on the eastern horizon suddenly changed in color—first to a roseate flush, then to a warm crimson; the scenes round us, sky, sea and land, brightened as if by magic. And with equal suddenness there shot round the edge of the southern extremity of the cove, outlining itself against the red sky in the distance, the long, low-lying hulk of a vessel—a dark, sinister-looking thing which I recognized at once as a torpedo-destroyer. It was coming along about half a mile outside the bar at a rate of speed which would, I knew, quickly carry it beyond our field of vision. And I was wondering whether from its decks the inside of the cove and the yawl lying at anchor there were visible when it suddenly slacked in its headlong career, went about seaward, and, describing the greater part of a circle, came slowly in toward the bar, nosing about there beyond the line of white surf, for all the world like a terrier at the lip of some rat-hole.

Suddenly, right behind her, far across the gray sea, the sun shot up above the horizon—her long dark hull cut across his ruddy face. And we were then able to make out shapes that moved here and there on her deck. There were live men there—but on the yawl we saw no sign of life.

Yet, even as we looked, life sprang up there again. Once more a shot rang out, followed by two others in sharp succession. And as we stared in that direction, wondering what this new affray could be, we saw a boat shoot out from beneath the bows with a low, crouching figure in it which was evidently making frantic efforts to get away. Somebody on board the yawl was just as eager to prevent this escape; three or four shots sounded—following on one of them the figure in the boat fell forward with a sickening suddenness.

"Got him!" I said involuntarily. "Poor devil—whoever he is!"

"No!" exclaimed Miss Raven. "See! He's up again!"

The figure was struggling to an erect position—even at that distance we could make out the effort. But the light of the newly risen sun was so dazzling and confusing that we could not tell if the figure were that of an Englishman or a Chinaman—it was, at any rate, the figure of a tall man. And whoever he was, he managed to rise to his feet and to lift an arm in the direction of the yawl, from which he was then some twenty yards away. Two more shots rang out—one from the yawl, another from the boat. It seemed to me that the man in the boat swayed, but a moment later he was again busy at his oars. No further shot came from the yawl, and the boat drew farther and farther away from it in the direction of a spit of land some three or four hundred yards from where we stood. There were high rocks at the sea-end of that spit—the boat disappeared behind them.

Calling to me to look, Miss Raven pointed across the cove and beyond the bar to a boat that had put off from the destroyer and was being pulled at a rapid rate toward the line of surf which, under the deepening tide, was now but a thin streak of white. It seemed to me that I could see the glint of arms above the flash of the oars—anyway, there was a boat's crew of bluejackets there.

"They're going to board her!" I exclaimed. "I wonder what they'll find."

"Dead men," answered Miss Raven quietly. "What else? After all that shooting! I should think that man who's just got away was the last."

"There was a man left on board who fired at him—and at whom he fired back," I pointed.

"Yes—and who never fired again," she retorted. "They must all— Oh!"

She interrupted herself with a sharp exclamation, and turning from watching the bluejackets and their boat, I saw that she was staring at the yawl. From its forecastle a black column of smoke suddenly shot up, followed by a great lick of flame.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "The yawl's on fire!"

I guessed then at what had probably happened. The man who had just disappeared with his boat behind the spit of land farther along the cove had in all likelihood been one of two survivors of the fight which had taken place in the early hours of the morning. He had wished to get away by himself, had set fire to the yawl and sneaked away in the only boat, exchanging shots with the man left behind and probably killing him with the last one. And now—there was smoke and flame above what was doubtless a shambles.

But by that time the boat's crew from the destroyer had crossed the bar and entered the cove, and the vigorously impelled oars were flashing fast in the sheltered waters. The boat disappeared behind the drifting smoke that poured out of the yawl; presently we saw figures hurrying hither and thither about her deck.

"They may be in time to get the fire under," I said. "Better, perhaps, if they let the whole thing burn itself out. It would burn up a lot of villainy."

"Here are people coming along the beach," remarked Miss Raven suddenly. "Look! They must have seen the smoke rising."

I turned in the direction in which she was looking and saw on the strip of land and pebble beneath the woods a group of figures, standing at that moment and staring in the direction of the burning ship, which had evidently just rounded the extreme point of the cove at its southern confines. There were several figures in the group, and two were mounted. Presently these moved forward in our direction at a smart pace; before they had gone far I recognized the riders.

"A search-party!" I exclaimed. "Look—that's Mr. Raven in front, and surely that's Lorrimore, behind him! They're looking for us."

WE EXPLAINED the situation in as few words as possible.

"There may be men on there that need medical assistance," said Lorrimore. "Where's this boat you mentioned, Middlebrook? I'm going off to that vessel. Two of you men pull me across there."

"I'll go with you," said I. "I left my boots in the cabin—I may find them—and a good deal else. The boat's just along here."

The search-party was a mixed lot—a couple of local policemen, some gamekeepers, two or three fishermen, one of Mr. Raven's men servants. Two of the fishermen ran the boat into the water; Lorrimore and I sprang in.

"This is the most extraordinary affair I ever heard of," he said, as he sat down at my side in the stern. "You didn't see all these Chinamen? Miss Raven says that you actually suspected my man Wing to be on board."

"Lorrimore," said I, "in ten minutes you'll probably see and learn things that you'd never have dreamed of. Whether your man Wing is on board or not I don't know—but I know that that girl and I have had a marvelous escape from a nest of human devils. I can't say for myself, but—has my hair whitened?"

"Your hair hasn't whitened," he said. "You were probably safer than you knew, safe enough, if Wing was there."

"You've heard nothing of him from London?" I suggested.

"Nothing from anywhere," he replied. "Which is precisely why I feel sure that when he went there he came in contact with these people and has been playing some deep game."

"Deep—yes!" said I. "Deep, indeed! But what game?"

He made no answer; we were now close to the yawl and he was staring expectantly at the figures on her deck. Suddenly two of these detached themselves from the rest, turned, came to the side, looked down on us. One was a grimy-faced, alert-looking young naval officer, very much alive to his job; the other, not quite so smoke-blackened but eminently businesslike, was—Scarterfield.

"Good Heavens!" I muttered. "So—he's here!"

Scarterfield, as we pulled up to the side of the yawl, was evidently telling the young officer who we were; he turned from him to us as we prepared to clamber aboard and addressed us without ceremony, as if we had been parted from him but a few minutes since our last meeting.

"You'd better be prepared for some unpleasant sights, you two," he said. "This is no place to bring an empty stomach to at this hour of the morning—and I fancy you've no liking for horrors, Mr. Middlebrook."

"I've had plenty of them during this night, Scarterfield," said I. "I was a prisoner on board this vessel from yesterday afternoon until soon after midnight, and I've sat on yonder beach listening to a good many things that have gone on since I got away from her."

He stared at me in astonishment.

"Middlebrook," he said earnestly, "I don't understand it at all. You say you were on this vessel—during the night? Then, in God's name, who else was on her—whom did you find here—what men?"

He turned a quick eye on the naval officer.

"Then one of 'em's escaped—somehow!" he exclaimed. "There's only five here—and every man Jack is dead! Where's the other?"

"One did escape," said I. I, too, looked at the lieutenant. "He got off in a boat just as you and your men were approaching the bar yonder—I thought you'd see him."

"No," he answered, shaking his head; "we didn't see anybody leave. The yawl lay between us and him most likely."

Lorrimore and I, giving no heed just then to the detective's questionings about the escaped man, went toward the after part of the deck. Busied with their labors in getting the fire under control, the bluejackets had up to then left the dead men where they found them—with one exception. The man whom they had found in the bows had been carried aft and laid near the entrance to the little deck-house—some hand had thrown a sheet over him. Lorrimore lifted it—we looked down. Baxter!

"That's the fellow we found right forrard," said the lieutenant. "He's several slighter wounds on him, but he'd been shot through the chest—heart, perhaps—just before we boarded her. That would be the shot fired by the man in the boat, I suppose—a good marksman! Was this the skipper?"

"Chief spirit," said I. "He was lively enough last night. But—the rest?"

"They're all over the place," he answered. "They must have had a most desperate to-do of it. The vessel's more like a slaughter-house than a ship."

Scarterfield jogged my elbow as I stood staring at these unholy sights. He was keener of look than I had ever seen him.

"That fourth Chinaman," he said; "I must get him, dead or alive. The rest's nothing—I want him!"

I GLANCED round; Lorrimore, after an inspection of the dead men, had walked aside with the lieutenant and was in close conversation with him. I, too, drew the detective away to the side of the yawl.

"Scarterfield," I said in a whisper, "I've grounds for believing that the fourth Chinaman is—Lorrimore's servant—Wing."

"What!" he exclaimed. "The man we saw at Ravensdene Court?"

"Just so," said I. "And who went off to London, you remember, to see what he could do in the way of discovering the other Chinaman, Chuh Fen."

"Yes—I remember that," he answered.

"There is Chuh Fen," I said, pointing to one of the silent figures. "And I think that Wing not only discovered him but came aboard this vessel with him as part of a crew which Baxter and his French friend got together at Limehouse or Poplar. As I say, I've grounds for thinking it."

Scarterfield looked round, glanced at the shore, shook his head.

"I'm all in the dark—about some things," he said. "I got on the track of this craft—I'll tell you how later—and found she'd come up this coast, and we got the authorities to send this destroyer after her—I came with her, hell for leather, I can tell you, from Harwich. But I don't know a lot that I want to know. Baxter, now—you're sure that man laying dead there is the Baxter we heard of at Blyth and traced to Hull?"

"Certain," said I. And then I gave him a brief account of what had happened since yesterday.

When I told him of Baxter's theory about the rubies, Scarterfield obviously pricked his ears.

"Now, there's something in that," he said, with a regretful glance at the place where Baxter's dead body lay under its sheet. "I wish that fellow had been alive to tell more. For he's right about those rubies—quite right. The Quicks had 'em—two of 'em."

"You know that?" I exclaimed.

"I'll tell you," he answered. "After we parted, I was very busy investigating matters still further in Devonport and in London. And—through the newspapers, of course—I got in touch with a man who told me a lot. A Mr. Isidore Baubenheimer, dealer, as you may conclude, in precious stones. But I'll show you Baubenheimer's own words—I got him to make a clear statement of the whole thing and had it taken down in black and white, and I have a typed copy of it in my pocketbook—glance it over for yourself."

He produced a sheet of paper, folded and endorsed and handed it to me. It ran thus:

MY PLACE of business in Hatton Garden is a few doors away from the garden entrance to the old Mitre Tavern, which lies between that street and Ely Place. On, as far as I can remember, the seventh or eighth March last, I went into the Mitre about half-past eleven o'clock one morning, expecting to meet a friend of mine who was often there about that time. He hadn't come in—I sat down with a drink and a cigar to wait for him.

In the little room where I sat there were three other men—two of them were men that I knew, men who dealt in diamonds in a smallish way. The other was a stranger, a thick-set, middle-aged seafaring sort of man, hard-bitten, dressed in a blue-serge suit of nautical cut; I could tell from his hands and his general appearance that he'd knocked about the world in his time. Just then he was smoking a cigar and had a tumbler of rum and water before him, and he was watching, with a good deal of interest, the other two, who, close by, were showing each other a quantity of loose diamonds which, evidently to the seafaring man's amazement, they spread out openly on their palms.

After a bit they got up and went out, and the stranger glanced at me. Now, I am, as you see, something of the nautical sort myself, bearded and bronzed and all that—I'm continually crossing the North Sea—and it maybe he thought I was of his own occupation. Anyway, he looked at me as if wanting to talk.

"I reckon they think nothing of pulling out a fistful o' them things hereabouts, mister," he said. "No more to them than sovereigns and half-sovereigns and bank-notes is to bank clerks."

"That's about it," said I. "You'll see them shown in the open street outside."

"Trade of this part of London, isn't it?" he asked.

"Just so," said I. "I'm in it myself."

He gave me a sharp, inquiring look at that.

"Ah!" he remarked. "Then you'll be a gentleman as knows the vally of a thing o' that sort when you sees it?"

"Well, I think so," I answered. "I've been in the trade all my life. Have you got anything to dispose of? I see you're a seafaring man, and I've known sailors who brought something nice home now and then."

"Same here," said he; "but I never known a man as brought anything half as good as what I have."

"Ah!" said I. "Then you have something?"

"That's what I come into this here neighborhood for this morning," he answered. "I have something, and a friend o' mine, says he to me, 'Hatton Garden,' he says, 'is the port for you—they eats and drinks and wallers in them sort o' things down that way,' he says.

"So I steers for this here; only, I don't know no fish—d'ye see?—as I could put the question to what I wants to ask."

"Put it to me," said I, drawing out my card-case. "There's my card, and you can ask anybody within half a square mile if they don't know me for a trustworthy man. What is it you've got?" I went on, never dreaming that he'd got anything at all of any great value, "I'll give you an idea of its worth in two minutes."

But he glanced round at the door and shook his head.

"Not here, mister," he said. "I wouldn't let the light o' day shine on what I got in a public place like this, not nohow. But," he added, "I see you've a office and all that. I ain't undisposed to go there with you if you like—you seem a honest man."

"Come on, then," I said. "My office is just round the corner, and though I've clerks in it, we'll be private enough there."

"Right you are, mister!" he answered. And he drank off his rum and we went out and round to my office.

I took him into my private room—I had a young-lady clerk in there (she'd remember this man well enough) and he looked at her and then at me.

"Send the girl away," he muttered. "There's a matter of undressing—d'ye see?—in getting at what I want to show you."

I sent her out of the room and sat down at my desk. He took off his overcoat, his coat and his waistcoat, shoved his hand into some secret receptacle that seemed to be hidden in the band of his trousers, somewhere behind the small of his back, and, after some acrobatic contortions and twistings, lugged out a sort of canvas parcel, the folds of which he unwrapped leisurely. And suddenly, coming close to me, he laid the canvas down on my blotting-pad and I found myself staring at some dozen or so of the most magnificent pearls I ever set eyes on and a couple of rubies which I knew to be priceless. I was never more astonished in my life, but he was as cool as a cucumber.

"What d'ye think o' that lot, mister?" he asked. "I reckon you don't see a little lot o' that quality every day."

"No, my friend," said I, "nor every year, either, nor every ten years. Where on earth did you get them?"

"Away East," said he, "and I've had 'em some time, not being particular about selling 'em, but I've settled down in England now, and I think I will sell 'em and buy house-property with the money. What do you fix their vally at, now, mister—thereabouts, anyway?"

"Good Heavens, man!" I said. "They're worth a great deal of money—a great deal!"

"I'm very well aware o' that, mister," he answered. "Very well aware, indeed—nobody better. I seen a deal o' things in my time, and I ain't no fool."

"You really want to sell them?" I asked.

"If I get the full price," said he. "And that, of course, would be a big 'un."

"The thing to do," I said, "would be to find somebody who wants to complete a particularly fine set of pearls—some very rich woman who'd stick at nothing. The same remark applies to the rubies."

"Maybe you could come across some customer?" he suggested.

"No doubt, in a little time," I answered.

"Well," he said, "I'm going up north—I've a bit o' business that way, and I reckon I'll be back here in London in a week or so—I'll call in then, mister, and if you've found anybody that's likely to deal, I'll show 'em the goods with pleasure."

"You'd better leave them with me, and let me show them to some possible buyers," I said. But he was already folding up his canvas wrapping again.

"Guv'nor," he answered, "I can see as how you're a honest man, and I treats you as such, and so will, but I couldn't have them things out o' my possession for one minute until I sells 'em. I've a brother, mister," he added, "as owns a half-share in 'em—d'ye see?—and I holds myself responsible to him. But now that you've seen 'em, guv'nor, find a buyer or buyers—I'll shove my bows round that door o' yours again this day week." And with that he restored his treasures to their hiding-place, assumed his garments once more, and remarking that he had a train to catch, hastened off, again assuring me that he would call in a week, on his return from the North.

It was not until he had been gone several minutes that I remembered that I had forgotten to ask his name. I certainly expected him to be back at the end of the week—but he didn't come, and just then I had to go away. Now, I take him to have been the man, Salter Quick, who was murdered on the Northumberland coast—no doubt for the sake of those jewels. As for their value, I estimated it, from my cursory examination of them, to have been certainly not less than eighty thousand pounds.

I FOLDED up the statement and restored it to Scarterfield.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

"Salter Quick, without a doubt," I answered. "It corroborates Baxter's story of the rubies. He didn't mention any pearls. And I think now, Scarterfield, that Salter Quick's murder lies at the door of one of those Chinamen who, in their turn, are lying dead before us."

"Well, and that's what I think," said he. "Though however a Chinaman could be about this coast without the local police learning something of it at the time they were inquiring into the murder beats me. However, there it is—I feel sure of it. And I was going to tell you—I got wind of this yawl down Limehouse way. I found out that she'd been in the Thames, and that her owner had enlisted a small crew of Chinamen and gone away with them, and I found out further that she'd been seen off the Norfolk coast, going north. So then I pitched a hot and strong story to the authorities about piracy and all manner of things, and they sent this destroyer in search of Baxter, and me on her. If we'd only been twelve hours sooner!"

Lorrimore and the lieutenant came up to us.

"My men have got the fire completely beaten," said the lieutenant, glancing at Scarterfield. "If you want to look round——"

We began a thorough examination of the yawl in the endeavor to reconstruct the affair of the early morning.

Reckoning up everything we saw, it seemed to me, from my knowledge of the preceding incidents, that the drug which the Chinese gentleman, as Baxter had called him, administered had not had the effects that he desired and anticipated, and that one or other of the two men to whom it had been given had been roused from sleep before any attack could be made on both. I figured things in this way: Baxter or the Frenchman or both had awakened and missed the Chinaman. One or both had turned out to seek him, had discovered that Miss Raven and I were missing, had scented danger to themselves, found the Chinese up to some game and opened fire on them. Evidently the first fighting—as I had gathered from the revolver-shots—had been sharp and decisive; I formed the conclusion that when it was over there were only two men left alive, of whom one was Baxter and the other the man whom we had seen escaping in the boat. Baxter, I believed, had put up some sort of barricade and watched his enemy from it; that he himself was already seriously wounded I gathered from two facts—one that his body had several superficial wounds on arms and shoulders, and that in the cabin, behind the hastily constructed barricade, sheets had been torn into strips for bandages which we found on these wounds, where, as far as he could, he had roughly twisted them. Then, according to my thinking, he had eventually seen the other survivor, who was probably in like case with himself as regards superficial wounds, endeavoring to make off, and, emerging from his shelter, had fired on him from the side of the yawl, only to be killed himself by return fire.

A significant exclamation from Scarterfield called me to his side—he, aided by one of the bluejackets, was examining the body of Chuh Fen.

"Look here!" he murmured as I went up to him. "This chap has been searched. After he was dead, I mean. There's a body-belt that he wore—it's been violently torn from him, his clothing ripped to get at it, and the belt itself hacked to pieces in the endeavor to find something. Whose work has that been?"

"The work of the man who got away in the boat," said I. "Of course he's been after those rubies and pearls, Scarterfield."

"We must be after him," he said. "You say you think he was wounded in getting away?"

"He was certainly wounded," I affirmed. "I saw him fall headlong in the boat after the first shot; he recovered himself, fired the shot which no doubt finished Baxter, and must have been wounded again, for the two men again fired simultaneously, and the man in the boat swayed at that second shot. But once more he pulled himself together and rowed away."

"Well, if he's wounded, he can't get far without attracting notice," declared Scarterfield. "We'll organize a search for him presently. But first let's have a look into the quarters that these Chinamen occupied."

The smoke of the fire—which seemed to have broken out in the forecastle and had been confined to it by the efforts of the sailors from the destroyer—had now almost cleared away, and we went forward to the galley. On a shelf near the stove was laid out what I took to be the things which the vanished cook, whoever he might be, had destined for breakfast—a tempting one of kidneys and bacon, soles, eggs, a curry. I gathered from this, and pointed my conclusion out to Scarterfield, that the presiding genius of the galley had had no idea of the mutiny into which he had been plunged soon after midnight.

"Aye!" said Scarterfield. "Just so—I see your point. And—you think that man of Lorrimore's, Wing, was aboard, and that, if so, he's the man who's escaped?"

"I've strong suspicions," said I. "Yet they were based on a plum cake."

"Well, I've known of worse clues," he rejoined. "But—I wonder— Now, if only we knew——"

Just then Lorrimore came along, poking his head into the galley. He suddenly uttered a sharp exclamation and reached an arm to a black-silk cap which hung from a peg on the boarding above the stove.

"That's Wing's!" he said in emphatic tones. "I saw him make that cap himself."

THE bit of head-gear which Lorrimore had taken down assumed a new interest. Scarterfield and I gazed at it as if it might speak to us. Nevertheless, the detective showed some incredulity.

"That's the sort of cap that any Chinaman wears," he remarked. "It may have belonged to any of them."

"No!" answered Lorrimore, with emphatic assurance. "That's my man's. I saw him making it—he's as deft with his fingers, at that sort of thing as he is at cooking. And since this cap is his, and as he's not among the lot there on deck, he's the man that you, Middlebrook, saw escaping in the boat. And since he is that man, I know where he'd be making."

"Where, then?" demanded Scarterfield.

"To my house," answered Lorrimore.

Scarterfield showed more doubt.

"I don't think that's likely, Doctor," he said. "Presumably he's got those jewels on him, and I should say he'd get away from this with the notion of trusting to his own craft to get unobserved on a train and lose himself in Newcastle. A Chinaman with valuables on him worth eighty thousand pounds? Come!"

"You don't know that he's any valuables of any sort on him," retorted Lorrimore. "That's all supposition. I say that if my man Wing was on this vessel—as I'm sure he was—he was on it for purposes of his own. He might be with this felonious lot, but he wouldn't be of them. I know him—and I'm off to get on his track. Lay you anything you like—a thousand to one—that I find Wing at my house."

"I'm not taking you, Lorrimore," said I. "I don't mind laying the same."

Scarterfield looked curiously at the two of us. Apparently his belief in Chinese virtue was not great.

"Well," he said, "I'm on his track, anyhow, and I propose we get away to the beach. There's nothing more we can do here. These naval people have got this job in charge now. Let's leave them to it. Yet," he added, as we left the galley, and with a significant glance at me, "there is one thing: Middlebrook, wouldn't you like to have a look inside those two chests that we've heard so much about?"

"I certainly should," I answered.

"Then we will," he said. "I, too, have some curiosity that way. And if Master Wing has repaired to the doctor's house, he's all right, and if he hasn't, he can't get very far away, being a Chinaman, in his native garments, and wounded."

The chests which had come aboard the yawl with Miss Raven and myself the previous afternoon—it seemed as if ages had gone by since then—still stood where they had been placed at the time, close to the gangway leading to the main cabin. Lorrimore, Scarterfield, the young naval officer and I gathered round while a couple of handy bluejackets forced them open—no easy business, for whether the dishonest bank-manager and Netherfield Baxter had ever opened them or not, they were screwed up again in a fashion which showed businesslike resolve that they should not easily be opened again. But at last the lids were off—to reveal inner shells of lead. And within these, gleaming dully in the fresh sunlight, lay the monastic treasures of which Scarterfield and I had read in the hotel at Blyth.

WE WENT off from the yawl, the three of us, in the boat which had brought Lorrimore and me aboard her. The group on shore saw us making for the point whereat the escaping figure had landed in the early morning, and followed us along the beach.

We spread ourselves out along the shore, crossing the spit of sand, now encroached on considerably by the tide, and began to search among the black rocks that jutted out of it thereabouts. Presently we came across the boat, slightly rocking in the lapping water alongside a ledge. I took a hasty glance into it and drew Miss Raven away. For on the thwarts and on the seat in the stern and on one of the oars, thrown carelessly aside, there was blood.

A sharp cry from one of the men who had gone a little ahead brought us all hurrying to his side. He had found, among the rocks, a sort of pool, at the sides of which there was dry, sand-strewn rock; there were marks there as if a man had knelt in the sand, and there was more blood, and there were strips of clothing—linen, silk—as if the man had torn up some of his garments for temporary bandages.

"He's been here," said Lorrimore in a low voice. "Probably washed his wounds here—salt is a styptic. Flesh-wounds, most likely, but," he added, sinking his voice still lower, "judging from what we've seen of the blood he lost, he must have been weakening by the time he got here. Still, he's a man of vast strength and physique, and he'd push on. Look for marks of his footsteps."

We eventually picked up a recently made track in the sand and followed it until it came to a point at the end of the overhanging woods where they merged into open moorland running steeply downward to the beach. There, in the short, wiry grass of the close-knitted turf, the marks vanished.

"Just as I said," muttered Lorrimore, who, with Miss Raven and myself, was striding on a little in advance of the rest. "He's made for my place—as I knew he would. I know enough of this country to know that there's a road at the head of these moors that runs parallel with the railway on one side and the coast on the other toward Ravensdene—he'd be making for that. He'd take up the side of this wood, as the nearest way to strike the road."

That he was right in this we were not long in finding out.

Coming out on the top of the moorland, and rounding the corner of the woods, we hit the road of which Lorrimore had spoken—a long, white, hedgeless, wall-less ribbon of track that ran north and south through treeless country. There, a few yards away from us, stood an isolated cottage, some gamekeeper's or watcher's place, with a bit of unfenced garden before it. In that garden was a strange group gathered about something that at first we did not see—Mr. Cazalette, obviously very busy, the police inspector (a horse and trap, tethered to a post close by, showed how they had come), a woman, evidently the mistress of the cottage, a child, open-mouthed, wide-eyed with astonishment at these strange happenings, a dog that moved uneasily round the two-legged folk, whimpering his concern. The bystanders moved as we hurried up, and then we caught glimpses of towels and water and hastily improvised bandages and smelled brandy, and saw, in the midst of all this, Wing propped up against a bank of earth, his eyes closed, and over his yellow face a queer gray-white pallor. His left arm and shoulder were bare, save for the bandages which old Cazalette was applying—there were discarded ones on the turf which were soaked with blood.

Lorrimore darted forward with a hasty exclamation, and had Cazalette's job out of the old gentleman's hands and into his own before the rest of us could speak. He motioned the whole of us away except Cazalette and the woman, and the police inspector turned to Mr. Raven and his niece and to myself and Scarterfield.

"I think we were just about in time," he said laconically. "I don't know what it all means, but I reckon the man was about done for. Bleeding to death, I should say. He's got a bullet through the thick part of his left arm, another at the point of the same shoulder, and a third just underneath it. Mr. Cazalette says they're all flesh-wounds—but I don't know. I know the man's fainted twice since we got to him. And look here! Just before he fainted the last time he managed to fumble among his clothing with his right hand and he pulled something out and shoved it into my hand with a word or two. 'Give it Lorrimore,' he said in a very weak voice. 'Tell him I found it all out—was going to trap all of them—but they were too quick for me last night—all dead now.' Then he fainted again. And look at this!"

He drew out a piece of canvas, twisted up anyhow, and opening it before our wondering eyes, revealed a heap of magnificent pearls and a couple of wonderful rubies that shone in the sunlight like fire.

"That's what he gave me," said the inspector. "What is it?. What's it mean?"

"That's what Salter Quick was murdered for," said I. "And it means that Lorrimore's man ran down the murderer."

And without waiting for any comment from him, and leaving Scarterfield to explain matters, I went across the little garden to see how the honest Chinaman was faring.

IT WAS a strange yet a plain story that Wing told his master and a select few of us a day or two later, when Lorrimore had patched him up. To anybody of a humdrum life—such as mine had always been until these events—it was, indeed, a stirring story. The queer thing, however—at any rate, queer to me—was that the narrator, as calm and suave as ever in his telling of it, did not seem to regard it as anything strange at all.

At our request and suggestion he had journeyed to London and plunged into those quarters of the East End wherein his fellow countrymen are to be found. His knowledge of the district of which Limehouse Causeway forms a center soon brought him in touch with Chuh Fen, who, as he quickly discovered, had remained in London during the last two or three years, assisting in the management of a Chinese eating-house. Close by, in a lodging kept by a compatriot, Wing put himself up and cultivated Chuh's acquaintance. Ere many days had passed another Chinaman came on the scene—this was the man whom Baxter had described as a Chinese gentleman. He represented himself to Wing and Chuh as a countryman of theirs who had been engaged in highly successful trading-operations in Europe, and was now, in company with two friends, an Englishman and a Frenchman, carrying out another which involved a trip in a small but well-appointed yacht across the Atlantic; he wanted these countrymen of his own to make up a crew. An introduction to Baxter and the Frenchman followed, and Wing and Chuh were taken into confidence as regards the treasure hidden on the Northumberland coast. A share of the proceeds was promised them. They secured a third trustworthy Chinaman in the person of one

Ah Wong, an associate of Chuh's, and the yawl, duly equipped, left the Thames and went northward. By this time, Wing had wormed himself completely into Chuh's confidence, and without even discovering whether Chuh was or was not the actual murderer of Salter Quick (he believed him to be and believed Wong to be the murderer of Noah, at Saltash), he had found out that Chuh was in possession of the pearls and rubies which—though Wing had no knowledge of that—Salter had exhibited to Baubenheimer. And as the yawl neared the scene of the next operations, Wing made his own plans. He had found out that its owners, after recovering the monastic treasures, were going to call at Leith, where they were to be met by the private yacht of some American, whose name Wing never heard.

So he made up his mind to escape from the yawl as soon as it got into Leith, to go straight to the police, and there give information as to the doings of the men he was with. But here his plans were frustrated. He was taken aback by the capture of Miss Raven and myself by Baxter and the Frenchman, and though he contrived to keep out of our way, he was greatly concerned lest we should see him and conclude that he had joined the gang. But that very night a much more serious development materialized. The Chinese gentleman, arriving from London, and being met by the Frenchman at Berwick, had a scheme of his own, which, after he had attempted the drugging of his two principal associates, he unfolded to his fellow countrymen. This was to get rid of Baxter and the Frenchman and seize the yawl and its contents for themselves, sailing with it to some port in north Russia. Wing had no option but to profess agreement—his only proviso was that Miss Raven and myself should be cleared out of the yawl. This proposition was readily assented to, and Chuh was charged with the job of sending us ashore. But almost immediately afterward everything went wrong with the conspirators' plans. The drug which had been administered to Baxter and the Frenchman failed to act; Baxter, waking suddenly to find the Chinamen advancing on the cabin with only too evident murderous intent, opened fire on them, and the situation rapidly resolved itself into a free fight, in the course of which Wing barricaded himself in the galley. Before long he saw that, of all the men on board, only himself and Baxter remained alive—he saw, too, that Baxter was already wounded. Baxter, evidently afraid of Wing, also barricaded himself in the cabin; for some hours the two secretly awaited each other's onslaught. At last Wing determined to make a bid for liberty, and cautiously worming his way to the cabin, he looked in and, as he thought, saw Baxter lying either dead or dying. He then hastily stripped Chuh of the belt in which he knew him to carry the precious stones, and taking to the boat which lay at the side of the yawl, pushed off, only to find Baxter after him with a revolver. In the exchange of shots which followed, Wing was hit twice, but a lucky reply of his laid Baxter dead. At that he got away, weak and faint, and managed to make the shore. The rest we knew.

SO THAT was all over, and it only remained now for the police to clear things up, for Wing to be thoroughly whitewashed in the matter of the shooting of Netherfield Baxter, and for everybody in the countryside to talk of the affair for nine days—and perhaps a little more. Mr. Cazalette talked a great deal; as for Miss Raven and myself, as actors in the last act of the drama which ended in such a tragedy, we talked little. But on the first occasion on which she and I were alone again, I made a confession.

"I don't want you—of all people—to get any mistaken impression about me," I said. "So I'm going to tell you something. During the time you and I were on that yawl, I was in an absolute panic of fear."

"You were?" she exclaimed. "Really frightened?"

"Quaking with fright!" I declared boldly. "Especially after you'd retired. I literally sweated with fear. There! Now it's out!"

She looked at me not at all unkindly.

"Um," she said at last. "Then, all I have to say is that you concealed it admirably—when I was about, at any rate. And"—here she sank her voice to a pleasing whisper—"I'm sure that if you were frightened, it was entirely on my account. So——"

In that way we began a courtship which, proving highly satisfactory on both sides, is now about to come to an end—or a new beginning—in marriage.

THE END

Oh, Ballyhoo!

There Was a Girl Involved in Joey's Decision; Otherwise It Might Have Been Different. But Do You Think He Was Glad That Things Turned Out as They Did?

By Paul Everman

TWO minutes after I had stretched out for a snooze in the judges' stand—my sleeping-quarters, by grace of the Fair Association and the job I had as spieler for its free acts—I eavesdropped the frame-up on my good but none too prosperous friend, Ev Sparkely.

Being honest, I proceeded to boil over. Then, still being honest and remembering Olive, I proceeded to unboil slightly.

"Well," said a voice hurriedly, from somewhere outside, "you wanted to see me?"

The voice belonged to Jack Coots, the new driver of Ev Sparkely's wiggler, Starlight.

"Yeh," came another voice, wheezy and devilish. "How are you, Milliken?"

In my mind's eye I could see 'em out there in the moonlight—Coots shivering, his snowbird face paler and even less controlled than usual; Ike Ellington, a little whisky-barrel of a man, watery-eyed and nasty.

"Wha'—wha' d'yuh mean?" It was Coots' voice again, shrill and unsteady. "My name's Coots."

Ellington laughed harshly.

"How 'bout a little race in California, where a guy named Milliken went crooked and got caught? Say; how 'bout it?"

"It was a frame——"

"Cut it! I've got yuh tied, Milliken. You're a new bantam in these parts, and I'm an old fox—ask anybody in Russiaville, Lebanon, Lafayette—anybody round the Interurban Circuit of Indiana."

"I come here to go straight," whined Coots.

"Cut it! I've got yuh tied! And Thursday—Thursday you're gonna drive a crooked race!"

"Gimme a chance! This is my first job here, my first race——"

"And your last one if you don't listen to me. Listen to me, you poor crip! You're gonna drive Starlight Thursday, but you ain't gonna drive for Ev Sparkely. No; you're gonna drive for me. Listen; you win the first heat, so's to jump the odds; and you lose the next two and the race! A pocket—the other drivers'll help you into it—you know how. The last two heats and the race. Get that?"

Somehow I could feel Coots weakening.

"But I ain't got a red, Ellington," he pleaded. "Gimme a stake."

"You're on, then?"

"Yeh; gimme——"

"Here's a coupla hundred. Ought to bring you seven, if you place it right."

They were walking away by this time, and the rest of their conversation was lost to me.

I jerked up and stared over the rail of the stand. I could see the two crossing the track, which stretched along in the soft moonlight like a smooth yellow river.

So hard luck was being framed for good old Ev Sparkely! Throughout the circuit his horse Starlight had been an unfailing winner in the two-ten pace. Only the week before, Stigall, Starlight's driver, had left for the Grand Circuit, and old Ev had signed up Coots, a newcomer, to drive the horse.

"And now," I thought, as I lay there staring at the stars, "Ev's being jobbed. Guess Joey Hoefer's ears were meant for something besides grab-handles after all. Guess his tongue'll loosen up for something besides ballyhoo. Watch Joey!"

So Coots had sold out for two hundred!

With the caution of the brotherhood, I felt in my pocket, where I had that same amount. Yes; it was still there—all I had in the world; just enough to tease a fellow. Now, five hundred or six hundred or seven hundred—yes, seven hundred—would be a sweet little stake—a sweet little stake.

As I lay there, brushed by the lazy warm air of late summer, with great solid gold of moonlight trickling in here, sluicing in there about me, my mind pictured a girl. She was a fetching girl, with hair like filigree, plump, smiling, friendly without fail.

And she was somewhere near.

"Olive," I gulped to myself—and down around my heart I felt sick and ashamed.

The devil must have been in my dreams that night. For the next morning I found a guy with a sucker-label on him, and I put up my two hundred against six hundred of his.

I was playing a Thursday race—the field against Starlight.

Late that evening I hunted up Ev Sparkely and found him sitting outside the door of Starlight's stall.

"Hi, Ev!" I had a guilty feeling, and somehow I couldn't act entirely natural.

"Howdy, Joey? Set down. You didn't come round last night."

"No, Ev; I was engaged in watching a coupla Ethiopians tackling a problem in cube root."

"Ethiopians? That's Bible, ain't it?" I caught a twinkle in his eyes.

"Yeh; Bible and geography and encyclopedia."

"You'll have to translate, Joey. This old farmer ain't much good at figgering things out, specially cube root."

I tried to laugh, but it was a typhoid effort.

"I was watchin' a coupla coon hostlers shoot craps."

"Haw!" Ev chuckled. "So that's where you was. I missed talking with you. Even went over by the judges' stand to see if you was there, but couldn't find hide nor hair of you. Have a chaw, Joey?"

"Thanks, Ev; but my molars won't stand for it. Starlight all right?"

"Finest kind! Always will be 's'long's Ev Sparkely owns and takes care of him."

"Right you are! Didn't keep him out long on the track to-day, did you?"

Ev wriggled in his creaky chair.

"Coots had him out and around a coupla times," he said. "Great evening, ain't it, Joey?"

"Betcha. Grips a chap."

Ev leaned far over.

"Joey," he said solemnly, "it makes me think o' the old farm."

"Yeh?"

"The air's got the same feel that it used to have when I'd take my chair after a hard day's work with the hoe or walking cultivator and set out under the big maples. The home place, that was, Joey—and I lost it. But"— he pounded his knee sharply—"I'm going to get it back!"

And then, with the stars beginning to twinkle and the moon booming up over the amphitheatre, old Ev told me the story.

FOUR years before he had left the farm, and with Starlight and two other wigglers had entered the racing game. Starlight had proved a ready winner, but the other two horses hadn't earned a cent. Seems that Ev hung on to 'em too long. He got in debt, put on his farm a paper plaster that bankers designate as a mortgage. Pretty soon there were two paper plasters. Starlight went lame.

"I lost the place, Joey. But with my hoss Starlight stepping round two-ten and better, I've made money these last two years. I've got a right smart of a stake—but not enough."

He stopped for a minute. Somehow I couldn't find a polite word to urge him on.

"Joey," he said finally, "yesterday I got a letter. The old place is for sale. I've got enough to buy it, lacking eight hundred dollars. And I'm going to get that eight hundred! I'm going to take all I got tomorrow and lay it on—well, I reckon you know who." He patted the stable door.

I jumped as if I'd been stabbed.

"See here, Ev," I began shrilly; "don't be a danged sucker——"

"I ain't."

"It's too big a risk, Ev—too big odds!"

"I know my hoss Starlight."

"No one knows a race-horse—or a horse-race."

"If I don't take this offer right away,

I'll lose out. Somebody else'll snap up the place in a minute."

"Can't you borrow the money, Ev? The banks——"

"Banks don't have much use for an old feller that's gone broke in the race-hossing business."

I was sweating liberally by now.

"Ev," I pleaded, "it's too big a chance. You may lose every red you've got. You don't know Coots; maybe he won't be able to handle Starlight like Stigall did."

"Coots handles him good's Stigall ever did."

I was silent, for, from what I'd seen of Coots, I knew that he was a sweet driver when he wanted to be.

Pretty soon Ev went on softly:

"Good old hoss Starlight! Something tells me he's going to bring back the old home—the place where he was born. Out of Hoosier Maid, he was; sired by Great Al. All legs as a colt and not much to look at. But I saw he was a race-hoss, and I trained him. Yup; I took the kinks out of him and raced him in these county road-races. Then he went in the two-thirty pace, with me still driving him. Got Stigall to drive him a coupla years ago, so's to get the best out of him. Good old hoss!"

"Bucky Boy's a fast wiggler," I warned him. "He'll make Starlight step, I tell you. Better not do this, Ev."

"Pshaw, Joey! I'd give my skin for that farm, and I'm going to have it. By golly, I'd give a million to be out under them big maples right now!"

I shook my head vigorously.

"Not for me! Gimme life just as it is right here—with the merry-go-round and the shows and the taffy and the fakes and the freaks and the shell-games and the confetti-hounds and the lemonaint! Gimme a fair, a carnival or a circus! Gimme a high-diver, a rope-walker, a loop-the-looper—a free act with a thrill! Gimme a crowd o' hungry rubes and a hot spiel to feed 'em with! Gimme a ballyhoo, Ev—a ballyhoo!"

Straight across in the green ring, just in front of the amphitheatre, lights for the night fair and concert began to twinkle here and there. Leo the Limit's incline burst into electric glow.

I sprang up—and stopped.

"Ev," I burst out, after a moment's hesitancy, "I want your advice on a matter. I'm going to state a hypothetical question."

"A what?"

I knew I was managing the thing pretty awkwardly, but I went on:

"A hypothetical question. I've got a friend, Ev. We'll call him Murphy. Murphy meets a girl not long ago. He falls for her. First night he's with her he asks her to marry him. She agrees.

"Mighty fine girl, you understand; pretty, and straight as a string. But Murphy gets to thinking. He don't want to leave fair and carnival life, and he don't feel like asking her to road it with him. Still, he knows where he can get a job selling lightning-rods, and settle down, if he has to. But he ain't got much money. Two hundred's all. He don't feel like asking the girl to start out with him on that.

"All right. He sees a chance to turn two hundred into six hundred. That'll be a good housekeeping stake, understand. But if he gets the six hundred, a friend of his'll be in hard luck—never mind what. See? It's either keeping his promise to the girl and hard luck to his friend, or it's bad luck to the girl and keeping his friend's respect. What's he to do, Ev?"

For a long minute Ev was silent. At last he spoke soberly.

"There was one woman, Joey, that I'd 'a' done anything in the world for. Reckon it's that way with any man. Your friend loves this girl, does he, Joey?"

"We-ell, he respects her."

Leo the Limit's voice, crashing raucously across the green ring, drew me to my feet.

"Oh, ballyhoo! Ballyhoo, Joey!"

"So long, Ev!"

"Same to you, Joey."

I crossed over in front of the amphitheatre. Leo the Limit was there strapping on his roller-skates—a brave thing in his red-silk shirt and abbreviated breeches.

THE band cracked out a snappy tune. A big crowd buzzed in from nowhere and settled about, thick as bees.

And there, pretty soon, I took my hat in hand and faced 'em earnestly. *I* was the king-pin of the minute. Banker, merchant, rube—all looked up to *me*. All got pop-eyed at the flaming adjectives I jerked out of my sleeve.

"Ladees and gentlemen," I cried, with a

sepulchral sob, "upon this beautiful September evening my heart is filled with fear and hope for the daring young man who now stands upon the topmost pinnacle of yon lofty incline! A slight swerve to the right, an almost imperceptible twitch to the left, a sudden gust of treacherous wind will hurl him into the yawning chasm of eternity—a mangled martyr laid down to the altar of entertainment as enjoyed by the amusement-loving American public! There he stands, a man without fear, the king of daredevils, the peer of hair-raising adventurers, the prince of death-defiers! He laughs at danger; he scorns fate; he flirts with death!

"Leo the Limit has attained international prestige and renown. He has performed before the crowned heads of Europe, the sheiks of Egypt, the rajas of the Orient. Last September he performed before King George the Fifth and showed for nine consecutive weeks at the royal palace at Buckingham.

"At a great cost your enterprising fair association has succeeded in bringing this famous attraction to your beautiful little city. Remember the hazard faced, the nerve required, the skill essential. One false move, and death awaits! Ladees and gentlemen, I introduce to you Leo the Limit, the king-pin of all death-defiers, for your approval!"

It was ballyhoo.

It was hallyhoo, and I was the ballyhooer; the ballyhooer that sent Leo the Limit shooting down the incline on his roller-skates, sent him high into the air, a whirling flash of red, in a mighty flip-flap, sent him through the perils of chance and in safety to the platform below. Ballyhoo!

THAT night I slept again in the judges' stand.

It was a hard night. A flashy passing of imagery blinded my mental eyes: Ellington, with his whisky-barrel body; Coots' chalky face; Olive, reproachful and sad; old Ev Sparkely, beaten and ruined by crookedness—my crookedness! Once, far in the night, I even thought I heard the tramp and rush of horse's hoofs close by.

"Ellington and Coots and Joey Hoefer—if there ain't three wormy-souled crooks for you!" I thought miserably. "I didn't put it up to Ev right. Why didn't I come clean with the whole business? I'm a coward. Poor old Ev!"

I dreamed of lightning-rods, of month-stands in the same town, of husbandly habits.

Creaky Ferris wheels and droning merry-go-rounds. Freaks and fortunes. Pop and cones. Shouts and whistles. Merriment.

A million people gazing up at *me*—Joey Hoefer, ballyhooer.

Oh—ballyhoo!

I was up at daybreak, donning a freshly pressed suit that had a bit of flash to it.

When I went to scoffins, I saw Ike Ellington. His fishy eyes had a triumphant squint to 'em. I took my gaze off of him, groaned, and hid behind my egg sandwich.

Stopping beside the bally platform of "Jacques, King of Cigarette Fiends," a minute later, I glanced furtively across at Olive, who was busy, as usual, in her father's refreshment stand.

Popular, Olive was; everybody liked her. And here, for the last three days, I had been gazing at her from a distance because I didn't have nerve enough to face her without making good the matrimonial plunge I had previously begun.

Crowds of people poured in that day. They wallowed in confetti and dust, ten thousand of 'em. They ate watermelons and bananas and chicken lunches under the big trees of the fair-grounds.

When two o'clock came, the amphitheatre was packed. The track was full of wigglers warming up on trial spins. The band burst out with a rousing march.

Inside the green ring I caught a glimpse of Ev Sparkely. He waved at me.

"I've got it all placed, Joey!" he shouted. "Every bit!" And disappeared.

"Two-ten pace," announced the starter, after a clang of his bell. "Number seven, Starlight, has the pole——"

From among the rail-birds I put my eyes on Starlight. Here he came, a classy chestnut, twisting uneasily at his bit, an angry gleam in his eyes. Behind him was Coots, goggled, sphinx-faced, his yellow-jacketed shoulders hunched far forward.

Eight horses swerved, turned, criss-crossed, checked for their places. Starlight wheeled into the pole station. He sprang forward with great, sidewise, frightened lunges. He took the wire two lengths ahead of the others.

Clang! The bell called him back. The eight again took their places, unevenly. Again Starlight lunged far ahead. Coots sawed desperately with the reins. But Starlight thundered on.

Again came the bell impatiently. Again the horses formed in lines for their positions. Again Starlight plunged ahead.

"Coots," bawled the starter, "take that hoss back! Take him back—*back!*"

He clanged the bell viciously.

As the horses placed again, the drivers scowled at Coots. I could see that he was worried.

Four more times Coots tried to hold Starlight for a "go," and four more times he failed. The starter consulted with the judges. He called Coots to the stand.

"Coots," he yelled severely, "take that hoss back—'way back! Shut up! Take him 'way back or I'll throw you off the sulky!"

And 'way back Coots went, his face in a venomous twist.

This time it was a "go." Starlight was three lengths behind. He broke, bucking wildly like a bronco. And when, at last, Coots settled him, he was fourteen lengths behind.

And then Starlight began to race, with his steady, weaving stride. The last of the string, he crept up steadily on the others. But the race was too short, the poor start too great a handicap.

Bucky Boy was first under the wire. Starlight came rushing up, broke again, and finished a poor sixth. It was the first heat he had lost in a year.

I watched him till I saw old Ev Sparkely spring out with a blanket to meet him and lead him off the track. Then I had to turn my head away.

Poor old Ev! I wondered if he had placed any money on the first heat. If he were betting on the race, one more lost heat would ruin him and—I got small satisfaction out of the thought—make my bet safe. Anyhow, Ike Ellington's plans had gone partly astray, for Starlight had lost the first heat, and the odds would not be jumped for a killing on the next two.

I went over beyond the judges' stand to help Leo the Limit do his flirt with death, and for a moment I forgot my miserable self. Five thousand people crowded about me. I held 'em spellbound. I was the king-pin of the minute.

It was ballyhoo—blessed ballyhoo!

At the starter's announcement, I almost tumbled off the rail.

"Second heat of the two-ten pace," he megaphoned. "El Toro, number two, is drawn—Sparkely now driving Starlight, number seven."

My eyes swept the track. There came Starlight, full of pep and with the angry gleam gone from his eyes. And "up" was old Ev!

I watched 'em dizzily. Starlight was a baby in Ev's hands. Seven horses swerved to their places. Here they came, flying for the wire. It was a "go."

Six horses bunched. Behind, at a steady, contented pace, came Starlight.

Half-way round they had strung out, with Bucky Boy leading.

As they swept past the amphitheatre for the first half-mile, Bucky Boy still led. Starlight was last. But it was a genuine horse-race, and the crowd got the fever of it.

"Oh, Bucky Boy!"

"Starlight! Come on, Starlight!"

"Yeah, Starlight! Come on!"

On they swept. The crowd grew frantic, urging, shrieking, imploring.

Only a quarter to go!

I imagined I saw Starlight crawling up on the leaders. Yes; he was gaining steadily. He passed the sixth horse, the fifth.

"Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!" It was Ev Sparkely's voice.

Of course Starlight paid no attention to the order. It was a trick Ev had taught him long ago—a trick to bewilder the other horses.

"Whoa! Whoa, boy! Whoa!" And Starlight passed the fourth horse.

Bucky Boy still led. The four leaders came thudding down the straightaway.

A gallant blaze of chestnut, Starlight shot into the lead, under the wire—and won by a good length.

SOMEHOW I lived till the third heat of the two-ten pace, and somehow I lived through it.

Here came Ev Sparkely with Starlight. The horses began wheeling for their places.

The amphitheatre rocked with cheers and cries for its favorite.

Under the wire the horses flashed. It was a "go."

Starlight had the jump.

"He'll never be headed," I told myself—and then changed my mind.

The second horse, Bucky Boy, came rushing up. Like a whirlwind he passed Starlight and took the pole. Elma J., a game little black mare, followed Bucky Boy. She cut past Starlight, her nose right at the rear of Bucky Boy's sulky.

Starlight was pocketed.

But it was a fair pocket. The pace was terrific. Bucky Boy streaked past the quarter. Elma J. twinkled behind. And in the pocket came Starlight, with his machinelike, weaving stride. The other horses were left far in the rear.

Past the amphitheatre they shot. A confusion of roars and groans, of stampings and whistles greeted them, sent them on.

Starlight was still in the pocket.

"Beat 'em! Beat 'em, Ev!" I yelled savagely, prayerfully. I couldn't help it.

A quarter to go!

Elma J. crept up even with Bucky Boy. I saw old Ev Sparkely quickly swerve Starlight up at the right.

"*Starlight!*" The glad cry burst from the amphitheatre.

Bucky Boy broke. A streak of chestnut shot past Elma J.

And at this point the race ceased to be a race and became a walkaway.

Starlight darted down the home-stretch, under the wire. He broke the track-record and gave himself a new mark—2:07½.

CROWDING past Ike Ellington's cursing remains, I marched determinedly across the track and to Olive's refreshment stand.

"Olive," I said frankly, "I got a bum steer on a horse-race just now and come out busted. A busted pardner is a poor one; so for your sake we'd better call the stuff all off."

She dimpled up a bit and laid a friendly hand on my arm.

"Say—I bet you was in earnest."

"You mean—" I began doubtfully.

"When you asked me to marry you. Why, I never thought much about *that*, Joey. 'Most all the boys ask me that at some time or other, and I try to be sociable— Bless your old heart, I bet you thought you was going to have to marry me! Excuse us both!"

Fanned by the sweet, peaceful air, I strode contentedly across the green ring that evening and hunted up old Ev Sparkely.

"How'd you do it, Ev?" I demanded bluntly.

He laughed for five minutes.

"Well, Joey, let's take one o' them—them cases——"

"A hypothetical case?"

"Yup; that's it. Let's take a friend o' mine named Hayseed, with a good hoss, say like my hoss Starlight. Hayseed goes over to talk to a young friend o' his that sleeps in the judges' stand. Friend ain't there; so Hayseed sets down back in the shadows and goes to sleep. When he wakes up he hears a coupla skunks framing up against his hoss. Huh!"

"By George!"

"Old Hayseed weren't no fool. Might take the hoss out himself at night and send him round a few times."

"I thought I heard——"

But old Ev droned on:

"Might fix the hoss so's he'd lose the first heat and get his driver in bad and even up the odds. Might bet a little money then. Might drive the hoss himself and set a new track-record. Huh!"

"Ev, you're an old crook," I averred, with a laugh that had a choke in it. "But what did you do to Starlight in the first heat?"

"Hayseed," corrected Ev. "What'd Hayseed do? Well, Hayseed might cut a mite o' hair off the hoss's front legs, just above the fetlocks. Might put a coupla good stout cockleburs next to the bare hide and cover 'em with bandages. Might worry the hoss some, so that Coots or Pop Geers or anybody else couldn't hold him, let alone drive him. Haw!"

The old man leaned far over in the starlit dusk and gripped my arm.

"Joey, me and Starlight's going back to the old place to rest up for the winter. We want you to come along. Why can't you, Joey?"

"Who—me?" I gasped, horrified. "On a *farm?* Why, Ev, I'd croak! I couldn't——"

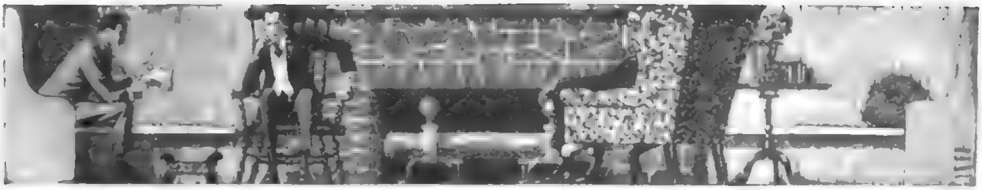
A voice crashing raucously across the green ring interrupted me.

I held up my hand.

"Listen, Ev; there's the answer."

It was Leo the Limit, calling me.

"Oh, ballyhoo! Ballyhoo, Joey! Ballyhoo!"



Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

IF WE credit publishers' figures of the tremendous sales of mystery stories, we must believe that all the world loves mystery. And so do the critics (they're part of the world, although apparently ashamed of it), despite the fact that they may admit it reluctantly. Perhaps you have read one of those frequent reluctant reviews which ended with something that you interpreted in this wise:

> We are quite sure that any one who starts reading this book will finish it, but we are also quite sure that it will not benefit him. It has the ingredients of the thriller, capably handled, perhaps, but it isn't literature. It doesn't uplift, but, unfortunately, it seems to be what the public wants.

YOU may have asked some questions, as we do when we read such a review:

> Why this critic, if a normal person, could read a book through and not find something creditable in it? Why the public needed so much protective attention? What was the harm in a book that the normal person could read to the end? Could there not possibly be some uplift, to say nothing of literature, in a book that enabled the normal mind to take an innocent vacation? And, lastly, why didn't this apparently self-conscious critic leave the discovery of literature to a future generation—where it belongs? You may have continued your silent argument by asking if relaxation weren't a necessary ingredient of life—if all fiction were very serious, very "uplifty," would we not soon begin to look upon all fiction as dull fiction?

EVERYBODY'S believes we would, and that is why the fiction of relaxation is always a prominent element in this magazine. Next month there will begin a mystery serial, "Swallowed Up," by Mrs. Wilson Woodrow, and a series of secret-service stories by Capt. Hugh S. Martin, formerly of the intelligence branch of the United States army.

It isn't often that a writer has lived his own mystery stories, as is the case of Captain Martin, who saw service in Russia and who will give us illustrations of German and Russian secret-service methods and of general conditions in Russia. His own career has been as absorbing as a story:

> Born in Mississippi. Early in life established intimate contact with cyclones and factional politics. Followed the various pursuits of attending school, selling books, floor-oil and sawmills. Went broke running a moving-picture show. Became a court stenographer. While traveling in Ohio, at eighteen, fell in love and remained in such condition long enough to write a novel and ten poems. Career as writer temporarily blasted by receipt of registered package containing returned engagement-ring. Read over novel and poems month later and became ill. Decided to become politician. Private secretary to U. S. Senator John Sharp Williams. After five years' experience with factional fights in Mississippi, office-seekers and tariff schedules in Washington, found that I was beginning to lose my amiable disposition and a considerable portion of my hair. Decided to become a diplomat.

AND here is where Captain Martin found real romance and mystery:

> To Petrograd, as attaché of our embassy there. After eight months' experience with Petrograd climate and Russian grammar, decided to become a revolutionist. Went through first Russian revolution, which overthrew the czar, with the loss of considerable sleep and a pair of goloshes. After that, life in Russia was just one revolution after another. Under régime of Kerensky was detailed as American representative with counter-espionage department of Russian secret service, assigned to north Russia. Five months later returned to Petrograd; commissioned in United States army and assigned to intelligence duty.

NOW come the thrilling experiences which will be told in Captain Martin's stories:

Got into good graces of Soviet at Murmansk and fared comparatively well until a group of terrorists holding the All-Russian open-murder championship took a dislike to me. After that divided my time between chasing and being chased.

Arrived in Moscow in midst of "Red Terror." Decided to return to Murmansk. Arrived there in time to join the North Russian revolutionary army, consisting of eleven hundred men of eleven different nationalities. Decided to invade Russia. Invaded. We took Archangel and pressed on to the south until we were forced to stop because of lack of men and supplies. Remembered that I had an engagement with one of the liberated inhabitants of Archangel. Returned. Married.

After arrival of American troops and establishment of North Russian Government, organized and was placed in charge of American secret-service division. Eleven months later, at the end of our participation in that picturesque and tragic war in the north, returned to the United States. Became a lecturer, and for following eighteen months engaged in speaking throughout various sections of the country. Discovered that there were Bolsheviks in America as well as in Russia.

PRELIMINARY to beginning one of the most unusual and readable mystery stories we have read in ages, Mrs. Wilson Woodrow solves another mystery for us. The Chimney Corner editor took a long breath and asked her, "Why are you called Mrs. Wilson Woodrow?" The answer:

Woodrow Wilson was named after his mother's oldest brother, Thomas Woodrow, ultimately dropping the "Thomas." I married Thomas Woodrow's oldest son, James Wilson Woodrow, who was called "Wilson" by his intimate associates. When I took my first story to an editor, I sent it in with my visiting-card, on which was engraved "Mrs. Wilson Woodrow." The ex-President at that time was an obscure college professor, so his name did not count. The editor merely chose "Mrs. Wilson Woodrow" instead of the "Nancy Woodrow" signing the article. Thus I was ticketed, so to speak, and my name became my trade-mark.

After publishing a number of stories in this editor's magazine, Mrs. Woodrow wrote a long series of stories for *McClure's* dealing with the life of the women in the remote Western mining-camps, a life with which she became familiar after her marriage. She continues:

My blessing or curse, whichever way you look at it, has always been my versatility or, rather, my desire to try different mediums of literary expression. The idea of keeping to one type of story, which my advisers urged, and which is sound advice commercially, bored me inexpressibly, so I've flitted from flower to flower—short stories, novels, essays, the pictures, even a play. Sometimes I've flivvered, sometimes succeeded; but I've had a beautiful time.

THERE will be a story next month, "The Acid Test," by Frank Richardson Pierce, who also has had a career as interesting as a story. He says:

Reporting on your contributor, Frank Richardson Pierce, I have found that this person has been arrested a number of times, has been in jail and was in an insane asylum for six months. He was born in Greenfield, Massachusetts, October, 1887, and moved to Pacific Coast at age of five months. Has lived here ever since, but plans to visit New York soon. Gold-brick artists please note. Is under impression that he "took" the law course at University of Washington, but one of his "profs" advises me he was merely "exposed" to the course. Decided it was better to be a poor writer and eat than to be a poor lawyer and starve.

And here's a confession, also the solution of the mystery with which the sketch begins:

If given a chance, he might become temperamental, but a four-year-old son makes this impossible. Married five years and still in love with wife. As hinted at in the first paragraph, this person worked six months in an insane asylum and found the experience novel; has been arrested for speeding, and in an effort to get out of Alaska during a fall rush, made a portion of the trip in the ship's jail.

SAMPSON RAPHAELSON, whose remarkable story, "The Day of Atonement," appeared in January, will have another story in April—a story in a different vein, but a good one. Here is the comment of a reader on "The Day of Atonement":

The story gripped me from the beginning, roused sacred memories of bygone days and brought tears to my eyes. I cannot recall having read a book or story that touched my heart-strings as did this wonderfully written narrative which came home so forcibly.

And here's praise from John Tainter Foote, a foremost American writer:

I must have read several hundred stories in manuscript and type at the request of their authors in embryo, and until I picked up EVERYBODY'S and started in on "The Day of Atonement" not one single ray of hope have I found in an appalling gloom of ineptitude. You can understand, therefore, that you have given me the shock of my literary life. The story is astonishing. The author somehow has arrived at the assured rhythm of the finished spinner of yarns with his first story. Or is it his first? [No. *Editor.*] At any rate, he need have no doubts about devoting himself to the writing game from now on.

EVERYBODY'S is glad to say that Mr. Raphaelson will be a regular contributor.

SEWELL HAGGARD.

Prose *and* Worse, *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

In Manhattan, Kan.: ***"Shute the Tailor."***
In Portageville, Mo.: ***"Gus Meatte, Butcher."***
Overheard in restaurant: ***"Gimme two fried eggs with headlights burning."***
In Chicago: ***"Hick's Buffet."*** **(And yet I saw a lot of city slickers buffeting in there.)**

(Cape Girardeau Southeast Missourian)

J. H. Hutson, of Bloomfield, who died Sunday and was buried Monday, returned to his home Tuesday afternoon.

Many happy returns.

(Buffalo Times)

Refined lady wishes position as housekeeper or anything. Address, Housekeeper, 185 Whitney Place. (F. R. G.)

The female of the species is more reasonable than the male.

(Chicago Tribune)

Mr. and Mrs. Kersey Coates Reed, of 936 Lake Shore Drive, will go out in March for a few weeks' stay.

Why not pack 'em in moth-balls until fall?

On Albany Ave., Chicago, lives Otto Hrdlicker.

He has my sympathies, 'cause I've been out of it for months.

LADY MACDUFF, OREGON'S CHAMPION HEN, LAYS THIRTY EGGS IN THIRTY DAYS

Lay on, Macduff, at 90 cents a dozen!

(Wilmington, Ill., Advocate)

His death was caused by pottomine poisoning.

Always fatal.

(Springfield, O., Sun)

REV. SMITH TALKS BEFORE STRIKING THEATRE EMPLOYEES

(J. E. M.)

If he'd struck 'em first, they'd probably paid more attention.

(From Los Angeles paper)

At night the men slept in four rooms, two in a bed, with deputies sitting in the hall in shifts.

Trying to freeze 'em out?

(Superior, Ariz., Sun)

The new driveway leading to the cemetery and the golf-links has been traveled a good deal during the last ten days and is greatly appreciated.

Some "approach."

(Petaluma, Cal., Argus)

Eugene Horace Cogley, native of Iowa, 660 years of age, dropped dead in Santa Rosa Monday evening at 5:30.

That wonderful climate again!

(Holyoke Transcript)

MOTOR CARS KILLED IN NEW YORK IN OCTOBER

During last month, 231 persons died in motor accidents in the state, which is at the rate of nearly 280 deaths a year.

Let me see: "Thirty days hath," etc.

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(University of W. Va. Athenaeum)

"The human body contains enough iron to make four ten-penny nails, enough ingredients for 1200 eggs, enough gas to fill 2700 cubic feet, enough hydrogen to float a balloon carrying its own weight, enough fat to make 75 candles and a cake of soap, besides six tablespoonfuls of salt, a bowl of sugar and ten gallons of water," said Rev. F. E. Brininstool, educational secretary for the Baptist Church in West Virginia, speaking at convocation last Wednesday morning.

Rev. Brininstool's subject was, "Life, Balanced or Lopsided."

Now, if somebody would only loan me a cake of yeast.

(Duncan, Okla., Eagle)

SAFES ARE BLOWN AND PAIR ESCAPE BEFORE MOLESTED

Fulfilling the Scripture: "They also serve who only stand and wait."

(Gary, Ind., Tribune)

The wheels passed over his dinner-pail and for a few minutes he was stunned. (H. S. J.)

The piece of stummy cake wasn't touched.

(Green Bay Press-Gazette)

Mr. and Mrs. Onyon, of San Francisco, California, became the parents of a son June 8.

Don't you just love young onyons?

Married last week at Michigan City: Agota Ceporta and Peter Lekowski.

That's part of the bargain.

(New York Evening Mail)

The increase in native whites amounted to 425,847, foreign-born 24,265 and negroes 65,355. The remainder of the increase, or seven-tenths of one per cent., was made up of other than whites or blacks.

As, for instance?

(Asbury Park, N. J., paper)

NEW JERSEY.—Rooms and board like mother makes. (E. R. R. H.)

Poor, overworked mother!

(Chicago Commerce)

F. D. E. Babcock now N. A. C. O. S. President.

W., I. A. M. G. T. K. It.

(Cleveland Press)

Woman caused arrest of man who pulled dandelions from her yard.

I know a lot of men who would have *killed* him.

(Pocatello, Idaho, Tribune)

TO RENT—One room, furnished, for bachelor, no children. 817 S. Harrison.

I just *knew* I shouldn't adopt that French kid.

(Saturday Evening Post)

At this moment a car flew up the quiet street, tootled and stopped. In the exact space of half a minute, Mary came in. Mary was bronzed and full of beans.

Can't I help you to some more of the tootler?

(Springfield, O., Sun)

BREAK LOOMS IN IRISH CONFERENCE (J. E. M.)

Off with the usual smashing start.

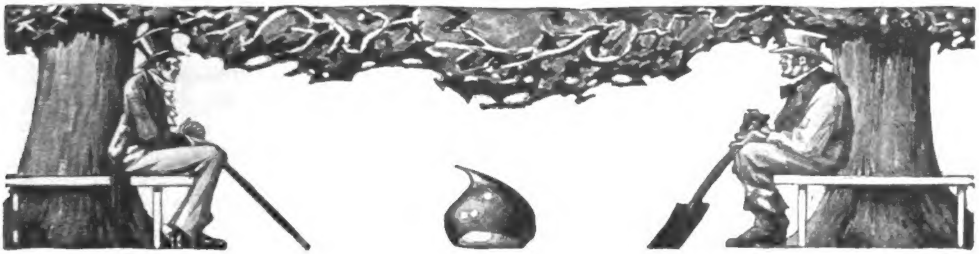
Married, at Obed, Kentucky, Miss Polly Couch and Mr. Charles Davenport.

"In the spring a young man's fancy," etc.

(Chicago Dental Languagerie)

Dr. Dunn advertises "Practice Limited to Extraction of Teeth." (What! No payment exacted?) Of course, if you can't go to Day, you can always go to Morrow. There are several Young dentists, also Dr. Green, all of whom are old at the business. If you want a quick job go to Bing. Bohr never says a word to you, nor, surprisingly, do the several Barbers. Born had to study hard at it; Link is a natural bridge-specialist; while Bridgman also extracts. Foote ought to be good on hoof-and-mouth disease. Aiken is busy all the time. Early has "evening hours for business people," while Fehr is not afraid of tackling any job. Witt is a quiet chap, while Cross, Stern and Huff are all jokers. Little *is* that way, but Low is a six-footer, while Stout tips the scales at 116. Lots of 'em will treat you White, and many of them Wright. Strange, but Tippler's a strict prohibitionist. I've seen women and children in Manz's office; also adults in Child's office, but I've never known Plummer to go back after his tools. And Leake, they say, is great at treating running abscesses. For good looks, Prettyman, Juel and Perl surely have the goods. Blase is a sprightly chap at his work, though when I'm nervous-like, I usually go to Bliss or Rest. But Lappe would be, I should say, great on laparotomy cases, when it feels as if the roots of your teeth went down that far.

But the one who is always on the jump is Aiken.



Everybody's Chestnut Tree

Editor's Note: Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped addressed envelope.

THE tea-fight was in full blast. Miss Dana Gatlin, the hostess, had asked "lemon or cream?" the right number of times. She registered an inward chuckle at the "How clever of you!" of the girl who perpetrated free verse and rolled-down stockings when she told her that she made the cake herself. It was a frosted cake cut into generous squares.

"I'm really rather proud of it," said Miss Gatlin. "If you're interested in housekeeping, I'll show you how it's done some afternoon. You see, the point is that it's made with only one egg."

The girl blew two delicate rills of smoke through her nostrils.

"How fascinating!" she said. "And in which piece is the egg?"

THE proprietor of a certain shop is forever scolding his employees for their indifference in the matter of possible sales.

One day, hearing an assistant say to a customer, "No; we haven't had any for some time," the proprietor, unable to countenance such an admission, began to work himself into the usual rage. Fixing a stony eye on the assistant, he said to the customer,

"We have plenty in reserve, madam, plenty down-stairs."

Whereupon the customer looked dazed, and then, to the amazement of the proprietor, burst into laughter and walked out of the shop.

"What did she say to you?" demanded the proprietor of the assistant.

" 'We haven't had any rain lately.' "

WHEN little Freddie returned from school one afternoon, his father opened the door to let him in. Freddie was very much surprized to find his dad at home during business hours and asked how that was.

"Why, a little sister has just come into the world to keep you company."

"Oh, daddy, can I be the first one to tell mother about it?"

AN OLD German in Minnesota who had a case pending in court against a man named Jensen grew uneasy and one day approached his lawyer with this remark:

"Don't you think if I sent the chudge a couple of nice turkeys, he would decide in my favor?"

"Great Scott, no!" said the horrified lawyer. "That's bribery, and would make the judge very angry. Don't you ever try that."

To his relief, the old fellow seemed to give up the idea. When the decision finally came, it was in the German's favor.

"It's a good thing I sent the chudge dem turkeys," he said complacently to his attorney.

"What!" exclaimed the latter. "You did send them to him?"

"*Ja*," responded his client, adding, with a wink; "but I put Jensen's name on the package."

PARSON: Raymond, what would your mother say if she knew you were smoking cigarettes? I shall have to tell her.

Raymond: Gee; please don't! They're her cigarettes.

IT IS often stated that the coming generation knows far more about sports and pastimes than about the Bible. This contention was effectively strengthened the other day by little Minnie, aged six. Her parents were ardent motorists, and the little girl knew all about a car. She came across a picture of an angel wearing a halo. She rushed in to her mother, showed her the picture and exclaimed,

"Oh, mother, look at the angel carrying a spare tire!"

CONNECTING a town in one of the Southern states with the Gulf is an old-time railroad, over which runs a dilapidated train drawn by a wood-burning engine of antebellum days.

A traveler, making his first journey over the road, sputtered and fumed so much at the slowness of the train that finally the conductor became exasperated.

"Say, mister," he said; "if you don't like the time we're makin', I reckon you'd better git out an' walk."

"I would," snapped the passenger, "only, they wouldn't be expecting me so soon."

A COLORED couple stood once again before the probation officer.

"Now this," the officer said to both, "seems to me to be a case where there is nothing very much the matter except that your tastes are different. You, Sam, are much older than your wife. It is a case of May married to December."

There was a slight pause, and then Eva, the wife, was heard to remark in a tired voice:

"I—I really doan' know what you means by yer saying May is married to December. If yer goin' to talk that way, it seems to me to be a case of Labor Day married to de Day of Rest."

A TRAMP knocked at the kitchen door.

"Please, ma'am, I have lost a leg——"

"Well, it ain't here," said the irate mistress.

"WHAT are you, anyway," asked the wife contemptuously during a quarrel, "a man or a mouse?"

"A man," returned her husband bitterly. "If I were a mouse, I'd have you up on that table right now, yelling for help."

A PUBLIC-SCHOOL teacher in Dayton, Ohio, recently gave her pupils the topic, "What Would I Do if I Had a Hundred Dollars?" upon which to exercise their imaginations. The following was handed in by a fourteen-year-old colored lad:

> If I had a hundred dollars I'd frame it and sit up and look at it all night.
>
> The next day I would take it out go buy me a second hand car and ride it all night.
>
> Then I would carry it back and tell the man th car was no good and make him give me ninety nin back.
>
> Then I would add a dollar to it and put it in the City National Bank and let the interest pile up for twenty one years. Then I would draw it out and build me a confectanary and There I would have as much money as I wanted.

"YOUR HONOR," said the prosecuting attorney, "your bull pup has chawed up the court Bible."

"Well," grumbled the judge, "make the witness kiss the pup; we can't adjourn court to get a new Bible."

"I DON'T like those photos at all," he said. "I look like an ape."

The photographer favored his customer with a look of lofty disdain.

"You should have thought of that before you had them taken," was his reply as he turned back to work.

IT WAS Teddy's third day at school, and the teacher was asking the class for definitions of familiar objects. When she came to the word "barn," Teddy's was the first hand up.

"All right, Teddy; you may tell us what a barn is."

The reply came quickly:

"Please, ma'am, it's a garage where they keep animals."

TWO Tommies, turned punsters, went into a restaurant on the Eastern Front and said to the waiter,

"We want Turkey with Greece."

The waiter replied,

"Sorry, sirs, but we can't Servia."

"Well, then, get the Bosphorus."

The boss came in and heard their order, and then said,

"I don't want to Russia, but you can't Rumania." So the two Tommies went away Hungary.